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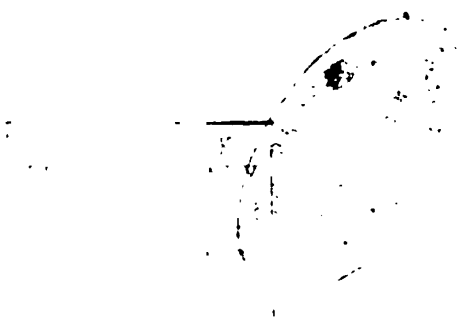
THOROUGHBREDS

THOROUGHBREDS



He saw Allis reach down for the slack rein running from her father's hand to Diablo's mouth.

Page 146.

THOROUGHBREDS

BY

W. A. FRASER

Author of
Mooswa, The Eye of a God,
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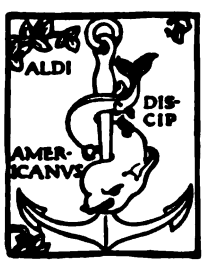

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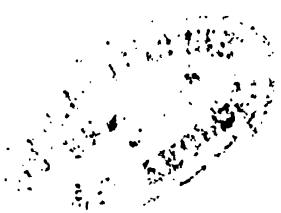
Second Edition

DEDICATED TO A

Thoroughbred

MY WIFE



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THOROUGHBREDS

I

Less than a hundred miles from the city of Gotham, across broad green fields, dotted into squares and oblong valleys by full-leafed maple, and elm, and mulberry, was the village of Brookfield. A hundred years of expansion in the surrounding land had acted inversely with the little hamlet, and had pinched it into a hermitical isolation.

The Brookfieldians had discovered a huge beetle in the amber of their serene existence; it was really the Reverend Dolman who had unearthed the monster. The beetle in the amber was horse racing, and the prime offender, practically the sole culprit, was John Porter.

By an inconsistent twist of fate he was known as Honest John. His father before him had raced in old Kentucky to considerable purpose, and with the full vigor of a man who races for sport; and so to the son John, in consequence, had come little beyond a not-to-be-eradicated love of thoroughbreds. To race squarely, honestly, and to the glory of high-couraged horses was to him as much a matter of religion as the consistent guardianship of parish morals was to the Reverend George Dolman. Therefore, two men of strong beliefs were set on opposite sides of the fence.

Even in the Porter household, which was at Ring-

wood Farm, was divided allegiance. Mrs. Porter was possessed of an abhorrent detestation of horse racing; also an assertive Christianity. The daughter, Allison, had inherited the horse taint. The swinging gallop of a striving horse was to her the obliteration of everything but sunshine, and the smile of fields, and the blur of swift-gliding hedges, and the driving perfume of clover-laden winds that passed strong into spread nostrils. For Alan Porter, the son, there were columns of figures and musty-smelling bundles of tattered paper money where he clerked in the bank. There had been great unison in the Porter household over the placing of Alan. In addition to horse lore, John Porter was a fair judge of human nature, and, beyond doubt, there was a streak of velvet in Alan which would have twisted easily in the compressive grip of the race course.

The Porter family were not the only dwellers of Brookfield who took part in racing. Philip Crane, the banker, wandering from the respectable highway of finance, had allowed himself to become interested in race horses. But this fact was all but unknown in Brookfield, so the full resentment of the place was effusively tendered to John Porter.

In his younger days some money had come to Philip Crane. The gambler spirit, that was his of inheritance, had an instinctive truth as allied to finance; but, unfortunately for Philip Crane, chance and a speculative restlessness led him amongst men who commerced with the sport of kings. With acute precipitancy he was separated from the currency that had come to him. The process was so rapid that his racing experience was of little avail as an asset, so he committed the first great wise act of his life—turned his back upon the race course

and marched into finance, so strongly, so persistently, that at forty he was wealthy and the banker of Brookfield.

Twenty years of deliberate reminiscence convinced him that he could gratify the desire that had been his in those immature days, and possibly work out a paying revenge. Thus it was that he had got together a small stable of useful horses; and, of far greater moment, secured a clever trainer, Dick Langdon.

Crane's latter-day racing had been successful—he made money at it. No man was ever more naturally endowed to succeed on the turf than was Banker Philip Crane. Cold, passionless, more given to deep concentrated thought than expression, holding silence as a golden gift—even as a gift of rare rubies—nothing drew from him an unguarded word, no sudden turmoil quivered his nerve. It was characteristic of the man that he had waited nearly twenty years to resume racing, which really came as near to being a passion with him as was possible for anything to be. There is a saying in England that it takes two years of preparation to win a big handicap; and these were the lines upon which Philip Crane, by instinctive adaptation, worked.

Quite by chance Dick Langdon had come into his hands over a matter of borrowed money. It ended by the banker virtually owning every horse that raced in the trainer's name. In addition, two or three horses ran in Philip Crane's own name. If there had been any distinctive project in the scheme of creation that gave Dick Langdon to the world, it probably was that he might serve as the useful tool of a subtle thinker. Now it did seem that Langdon had come into his own—that he had found his predestined master.

John Porter had not been successful; ill fortune had set in, and there was always something going wrong. Horses would break down, or get beaten by accident—there was always something. The steady financial drain had progressed even to an encumbrance on Ringwood.

Ringwood was simply a training farm, located close to an old disused race course, for there had been no racing in Brookfield for years.

. . . . . .

Inadvertently the Reverend Mr. Dolman had intensified the strained relationship that existed between the good people who frowned upon all racing endeavor and those who saw but little sinfulness in John Porter's way of life.

The church was in debt—everything in Brookfield was, except the town pump. The pastor was a nervous, zealous worker, and it occurred to him that a concert might lighten the financial load. The idea was not alarmingly original, and the carrying out of it was on conventional lines: local volunteer talent, and a strong appeal to the people of Brookfield for their patronage.

The concert in the little old clap-boarded church, its sides faded and blistered by many seasons of tempest and scorching sun, was an unqualified success up to the fifth number. Nothing could have been more successful, or even evoked greater applause, than the fourth effort, "Anchored," as rendered by the village pride in the matter of baritone singing; even De Reszke never experienced a more genuine triumph. The applause gradually fell away, and programmes were consulted preparatory to a correct readiness for the fifth offering. The programmes confided that "The Death of Crusader," by Miss Allis Porter, was the next item.

CHAPTER ONE

In the front row of seats a prim little body, full of a severe quaintness in every quirk of dress, tilted her head toward a neighbor, and whispered, "It's that racin' gal of John Porter's."

The neighbor answered in a creak meant for a whisper: "I'm right glad she's took to religion for onct, an' is givin' us somethin' about them Crusaders. They was in Palestine, you know. She's been away to boardin' school all winter, an' I guess it'll be a high-falutin' account of the war."

The quaint little old lady jerked her head up and down with decisive bobbiness. On the third upward bob her eyes opened wide in astonishment—a small, slim figure in a glaring red coat stood in the center of the improvised platform.

From beneath the coat fell away in long graceful lines a black riding skirt; a dark oval face, set with large wondrous gray eyes—the Porter eyes—confronted the quaint little old lady.

"That's the Porter gal," her neighbor squeaked; "I've seen her a-top them race horses more'n a hundred times. My! you'd think butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, she's that prim now."

"The coat would melt it," commented the quaint one.

Then a clear, soft girlish voice, with just a tremble of apprehensive nervousness, giving it a lilt like a robin's, said:

THE RUN OF CRUSADER

I

Full weight they had given the gallant big Black—a hundred and sixty he carried;
And the run for the "Hunt Cup" was over three miles, with mud-wall and water-jump studded.

THOROUGHBREDS

The best racing days of the old horse were past—there'd never been better nor braver—
But now once again he must carry the silk—I was needing the help of Crusader.
Could he win at the weight, I whisperingly asked, as I cinched up the saddle girt' tight;
He snuggled my hand as I gathered the rein, and I laughed when they talked of defeat.
To the call of the bugle I swung to his back—like a rock was the strength of his quarters.
At sight of the people he arched his lean neck, and they cheered for my King of all Hunters.

II

Ten horses would strive for the prize—a big field, and the pace would be killing.
From the West came Sweet Silver, a gray, gallant, and fearless in jumping.
A rakish old nag who walked over the sticks, had been sent for the Cup from Kentucky;
On a bay, Little Jack, who was fast, they had put but a hundred and thirty.
But I knew that North Star, a big brown—even the Black was no gamer—
With a pull of ten pounds in the weight, was almost a match for Crusader.
We made a brave troop, long-striding and strong, with the pick of cross-country riders,
As we filed past the Stand in stately parade, with its thousands of eager admirers,
And down to the turn on the lower far side, where a red flag was flicking the sunlight;
For twice we must circle the green-swarded field, and finish close under the paddock.

III

Just once we lined up; then down cut the flag, and "Go!" hoarse-voiced the Starter;
And the thunder of hoofs, and the clanking of bits, made music to me on Crusader.
Quick to the front, like a deer, sped a mare, a chestnut, making the running;
But I steadied my mount, and took him far back—with his weight he would need all my nursing.

They took the first hedge like sheep in a bunch, bit to bit,
and stirrups a-jingle;
And so past the Stand to the broad water-jump, where three
went down in a tangle.
I trailed at the heels of the Silver Gray—but Crusader was
begging for halter—
And flew the wide ditch with the swoop of a bird, and on
again, lapped on his quarter.
Then over the Liverpool, racing like mad, where Sweet
Silver fell fighting for lead,
And his rider lay crushed, white-faced to the sky; and to
miss him Crusader jumped wide.

IV

At the bank something struck, and a cloud of white dust
hid the wall as though it were shrouded;
But the big gallant Black took off with a swing—full thirty
feet ere we had landed.
As we rounded the turn I could see Little Jack go up to the
mare that was leading;
Then I let out a wrap, and quickened my pace, to work clear
of those that were tiring.
Once again past the Stand we drove at the ditch that some
would never get over;
And a cheer shook the air as the Bay landed safe; with the
mare on her back in the water.
Then over went North Star—though he pecked, and nearly
emptied his saddle.
As I lifted the Black at his heels, he frothed the Brown's
flank with his nozzle.

V

Then down the back stretch, o'er hedge and o'er bank, we
three were racing together;
Till at the next rail the Bay jostled the Brown, and riderless
crashed through the timber.
So we rounded the turn, and into the straight—North Star's
lean flank we were lapping—
But we shot to the front when I gave the Black head, and
I saw that the other was stopping.
We raced as one horse at the very last hedge—just a nose in
front was Crusader;
I felt the big Brown bump twice at my side, and knew he
was ready to blunder.

With stirrups a-fling, empty-saddled the Bay, stride for stride, galloped and floundered.
Just missing his swerve, I called on the Black, and drew out as he bravely responded.

VI

Just the last jump! and Crusader took off twenty feet from the brush-covered timber.
Then the Bay jumped—too short for his stride—and fell, with his head on my wither.
Down, down! almost to earth,—brought to his knees in the struggle,
The Black lost a length, the Brown forged ahead, and I was half out of the saddle.
How I sat down and rode! how the old horse strove! and the Brown rolling tired in his gallop.
On, gallant Black! on, my brave pet! We were almost under the paddock.
Then we nosed the Brown's flank; then we reached to his girt'; neck and neck—I rode at his shoulder.
As we flashed past the post I had won by a head. How they cheered, "Bravo, Crusader!"

VII

But Crusader stopped short; gave a sigh and fell dead; I stood all alone in the winning.
And a hush came over the clamorous mob; like a babe on his neck I was sobbing.
He had run his last race; game to the end, his brave heart broke in the striving.

The girl's voice faltered and died away to a broken whisper as she told of the death of Crusader. For a full minute there was a noiseless hush. The full pathos of the gallant horse's striving had crept into the hearts that were flesh and blood; and, carried away by their feelings, the people had forgotten all about their tortured convictions of the sinfulness of making a horse go faster than a sharp trot. Gradually into their awakening senses stole a conviction that somehow they were countenancing the sin of racing.

Before the complete horror of the situation had

"The Run of Crusader."

mastered the audience, a strong pair of hands, far back in the church, came together with an explosive clap. Like the rat-rat-tat of a quick-firing gun was the appreciative volley of recognition from the solitary applauder. It went rolling and crackling through the church defiantly, derisively, appreciatively. Halfway up the aisle a softer pair of hands touched the rattle with what sounded like a faint echo; then there was sudden silence. The entire audience turned and looked disparagingly, discouragingly, at the man who had figuratively risen as a champion of the scandalous recitation. Resentment had taken hold of the good Christians. That Crusader had enlisted their sympathies for a few minutes showed the dangerous subtlety of this "horse-racin' business."

The rest of the programme might just as well have been eliminated; the concert, as a concert, would be discussed for all time to come as having projected "The Death of Crusader."

The people flowed from the church full of an expressive contentiousness, seeking by exuberant condemnation of the sacrilege to square themselves somehow with their consciences for the brief backsliding.

Where the church path turned into the road a group of men had drawn together, attracted by the magnet of discussion. They quite blocked the pathway, oblivious to everything but their outraged feelings. Like a great dark blotch in the night the group stood; and presently two slight gray shadows slipping up the path, coming to the human barricade, stopped, wavered, and circled out on the grass to pass. The shadows were Allis Porter and her brother Alan.

One of the men, overfilled with his exceeding wrath,

seeing the girl, gave expression to a most unchristian opinion of her modesty. The sharp ears of the boy heard the words of the man of harsh instinct, and his face flushed hot with resentment. He half turned, bitter reproach rising to his lips. How could men be so brutish? How could they be so base? To speak ill of his sister Allis, who was just the purest, sweetest little woman that ever lived—too brave and true to be anything else but good!

As he turned he saw something that checked his futile anger. A tall shadow that had come up the path behind them stretched out an arm, and he heard the vilifier's words gurgle and die away, as one of the strong hands that had beat the tattoo of approbation clutched him by the throat. The boy would have rushed to the assistance of this executive friend if the girl had not clasped his arm in detention.

"It's Mortimer!" he cried, as a voice from the strong-armed figure cut the night air with sharp decision.

Then the shadowy forms twisted up grotesquely, weaving in and out. There were voices of expostulation and strong words of anger; but the new serious business that had materialized had most effectually put a stop to reflections upon the innocent girl who had so unwittingly offended.

"It's George Mortimer—he's in our bank," Alan confided to his sister, as they moved away. "He's all right—he's strong as a horse; and I bet Crandal'll have a kink in his neck to-morrow, where George pinched him."

"What was it about?" the girl asked.

"Crandal was jawing about people who own race horses," the boy answered, evasively. "It's Crandal, the butcher."

II

It was the May meeting at Morris Park, and Morris Park is the most beautiful race course in all America.

John Porter, walking up the steps of the Grand Stand, heard some one call him by name. Turning his head, he saw it was James Danby, an owner, sitting in his private box. Porter turned into the box, and taking the chair the other pushed toward him, sat down.

"What about Lucretia?" asked Danby, with the air of an established friendship which permitted the asking of such questions.

"She's ready to the minute," replied Porter.

"Can she get the five furlongs?" queried Danby. "She's by Assassin, and some of them were quitters."

"She'll quit if she falls dead," replied the other man, quietly. "I've worked her good enough to win, and I'm backing her."

"That'll do for me," declared Danby. "To tell you the truth, John, I like the little mare myself; but I hear that Langdon, who trained Lauzanne, expects to win."

"The mare'll be there, or thereabouts," asserted her owner; "I never knew a Lazzarone yet much good as a two-year-old. They're sulky brutes, like the old horse; and if Lucretia's beat, it won't be Lauzanne that 'll turn the trick."

The bell clanged imperiously at the Judges' Stand. Porter pulled out his watch and looked at it.

"That's saddling," he remarked, laconically; "I must go and have a bit on the mare, and then take a look at her before she goes out."

As Porter went down the steps his companion leaned over the rail and crooked his fingers at a thin-faced man with a blond mustache who had been keeping a corner of his eye on the box.

"What are they making favorite, Lewis?" queried Danby, as the thin-faced man stood beside him.

"Lucretia."

"What's her price?"

"Two to one."

"What's second favorite?"

"Lauzanne—five to two."

Porter tells me Lucretia is good business," said Danby, in a tentative tone.

"Langdon thinks it's all over bar the shouting; he says Lauzanne outclasses his field," retorted Lewis.

"Langdon's a betting man; Porter's an owner, and a good judge," objected Danby; "and he's got a good boy up, too, McKay," he added, slowly focusing his field glasses on the jockey board opposite the Stand.

"Crooked as a dog's hind legs," snarled Lewis, biting viciously at his cigar.

"Bob, it's damned hard to find a straight-legged dog," laughed Danby. "And when John Porter starts a horse, there's never anything doing. Here's six hundred; put it on the mare—straight."

As Lewis pushed his way into the shoving, seething, elbowing crowd in the betting ring, he was suddenly struck in the chest by something which apparently had the momentum of an eight-inch shell; but it was only John Porter, who, in breaking through the outer crust

of the living mass, had been ejected with more speed than was of his own volition.

Bob smothered the expletive that had risen to his lip when he saw who the unwitting offender was, and asked, "What are they doin' to the mare in the ring?"

"Not much," answered his assailant, catching his breath; "there's a strong play on Langdon's horse, and if I didn't know my boy pretty well, and Lucretia better, I'd have weakened a bit. But she can't lose, she can't lose!" he repeated in the tone of a man who is reassuring himself.

Lewis battled his way along till he stood in front of a bookmaker with a face cast very much on the lines of a Rubens' cherub; but the cherub-type ended abruptly with the plump frontispiece of "Jakey" Faust, the bookmaker. Lewis knew that. "If there's anythin' doin', I'm up against it here," he muttered to himself. "What's Lauzanne's price?" he asked, in an indifferent voice, for the bookmaker's assistant was busy changing the figures on his list.

Faust pretended not to hear him.

"Sure thing!" whispered Lewis to himself. Then aloud he repeated the question, touching the bookmaker on the elbow.

The Cherub smiled blandly. "Not takin' any," he answered, nodding his head in the pleasant manner of a man who knows when he's got a good thing.

"What's Lucretia?" persisted Lewis.

"Oh! that's it, is it? I'll lay you two to one."

The questioner edged away, shaking his head solemnly.

"Here! five to two—how much—" but Lewis was gone.

He burrowed like a mole most industriously, regard-

less of people's toes, their ribs, their dark looks, and even angry expressions of strong disapproval, and when he gained the green sward of the lawn, hurried to his friend's box.

"Did you get it on?" queried the latter.

"No; I don't like the look of it. Faust is holding out Lauzanne, and stretched me half a point about the mare. He and Langdon are in the same boat."

"But that won't win the race," remonstrated Danby. "Lauzanne is a maiden, and Porter doesn't often make a mistake about any of his own stock."

"I thought I'd come back and tell you," said Bob Lewis, apologetically.

"And you did right; but if the mare wins, and I'm not on, after getting it straight from Porter, I'd want to go out and kick myself good and hard. But put it on straight and place; then if Lauzanne's the goods we'll save."

Lewis was gone about four minutes.

"You're on," he said, when he returned; "I've two hundred on the Chestnut for myself."

"Lauzanne?"

"It's booked that way; but I'm backin' the Trainer, Langdon. I went on my uppers two years ago backing horses; I'm following men now."

"Bad business," objected his stout friend; "it's bad business to back anything that talks."

When John Porter reached the saddling paddock, his brown mare, Lucretia, was being led around in a circle in the lower corner. As he walked down toward her his trainer, Andy Dixon, came forward a few paces to meet him.

"Are they hammerin' Crane's horse in the ring, sir?"

he asked, smoothing down the grass with the toe of one foot, watching this physical process with extreme interest.

"Just what you'd notice," replied Porter. "Why?"

"Well, I don't like the look of it a little bit. Here's this Lauzanne runs like a dog the last time out—last by the length of a street—and now I've got it pretty straight they're out for the stuff."

"They'd a stable-boy up on him that time."

"That's just it," cried Dixon. "Grant comes to me that day—you know Grant, he works the commission for Dick Langdon—and tells me to leave the horse alone; and to-day he comes and—" he hesitated.

"And what?"

"Tells me to go light on our mare."

"Isn't Grant broke?" asked Porter, with seeming irrelevance.

"He's close next it," answered the Trainer.

"Aren't his friends that follow him all broke?"

"A good many of them have their address in Queer Street."

"Look here, Andy," said the owner, "there isn't a man with a horse in this stake that doesn't think he's going to win; and when it's all over we'll see Lucretia's number go up. Grant's a fool," he added, viciously. "Didn't he break Fisher—didn't he break every other man that ever stuck to him?"

"It's not Grant at all," replied Dixon, rubbing the palms of his hands together thoughtfully—a way he had when he wished to concentrate in concrete form the result of some deep cogitation—"it's Langdon, an' he's several blocks away from an asylum."

"Langdon makes mistakes too."

"He cashes in often when he's credited with a mistake," retorted the other.

"Well, I've played the little mare," asserted Porter.

"Much, sir?" asked Dixon, solicitously.

"All I can stand—and a little more," he added, falteringly; "I needed a win, a good win," he offered, in an explanatory voice. "I want to clear Ringwood—but never mind about that, Andy. The mare's well—ain't she? There can't be anything doing with McKay—we've only put him up a few times, but he seems all right."

"I think we'll win," answered the Trainer; "I didn't get anythin' straight—just that there seemed a deuced strong tip on Lauzanne, considerin' that he'd never showed any form to warrant it. Yonder he is, sir, in number five—go and have a look at him."

As John Porter walked across the paddock a horseman touched the fingers of his right hand to his cap. There was a half-concealed look of interest in the man's eye that Porter knew from experience meant something.

"What do you know, Mike?" he asked, carelessly, only half halting in his stride.

"Nottin' sir; but dere's somebody in de know dis trip. Yer mare's a good little filly, w'en she's right, but ye'r up against it."

Porter stopped and looked at the horseman. He was Mike Gaynor, a trainer, and more than once Porter had stood his friend. Mike always had on hand three or four horses of inconceivable slowness, and uncertainty of wind and limb; consequently there was an ever-recurring inability to pay feed bills, so he had every chance to know just who was his friend and who was not, for he tried them most sorely.

Porter knew all this quite well; also that in spite of Mike's chronic impecuniosity he was honest, and true as steel to a benefactor. He waited, feeling sure that Gaynor had something to tell.

"There's a strong play on Lauzanne, ain't there, sir?"

Porter nodded.

"Sure t'ing! That Langdon's a crook. I knowed him when he was ridin' on freight cars; now he's a swell, though he's a long sprint from bein' a gentleman. I got de tip dat dere was a killin' on, an' I axed Dick Langdon if dere was anyt'ing doin'; an' Dick says to me, says he, puttin' bot' t'umbs up"—and Mike held both hands out horizontally with the thumbs stiff and vertical to illustrate this form of oath—" 'there's nottin' doin', Mike,' says he. What d'ye t'ink of that, sir, an' me knowin' there was?" asked Mike, tragically.

"It's the biggest tip that always falls down, Gaynor; and they've got to be pretty swift to beat Lucretia."

"That filly's all right; she's worked out well enough to do up that field of stiffs. I ain't no rail bird, but I've hed me eye on her. But I ain't doin' no stunt about horses, Mister Porter; I'm talkin' about men. Th' filly's honest, and ye'r honest sir, but ye don't roide th' mare yerself, do ye?"

"You think, Mike—" began Mr. Porter, questioningly; but Gaynor interrupted him with: "I don't think nothin', sir, an' I ain't sayin' nothin'. I ain't never been before the Stewards yet for crooked work, or crooked talk; but there's a boy ridin' in dat bunch to-day w'at got six hundred for t'rowing me down once, see? S'elp me God! he pulled Blue Smoke to a standstill on me, knowin' that it would break me. That was at Coney Island, two years ago."

"And you don't remember his name, I suppose, Mike?"

"I don't remember not'in' but that I got it in th' neck. But ye keep yer eye open, sir. Ye t'ink that none of the b'ys would t'row ye down cause ye've been good to 'em; but some of 'em are that mean they'd steal th' sugar from a fly. I know 'em. I hears 'em talk, cause they don't mind me—t'ink I'm one of th' gang."

"Thank you very much, Gaynor; I appreciate your kindly warning; but I hope you're mistaken, all the same," said Porter. Then he proceeded on his way toward stall five, in which was Lauzanne.

"How are you, Mr. Porter?"

It was Philip Crane, standing just outside of the stall, who thus addressed him. "Got something running to-day?" he continued, with vague innocence.

Langdon, just inside the box, chuckled softly. Surely Crane was a past master in duplicity.

"I'm starting Lucretia in this race," replied Honest John.

"Oh!" Then Crane took Porter gently by the sleeve and drew him half within the stall. "Mr. Langdon, who trains a horse or two for me, says this one'll win;" and he indicated the big chestnut colt that the Trainer was binding tight to a light racing saddle. "You'd better have a bit on, Mr. Porter," Crane added.

"Lucretia carries my money," answered Porter in loyalty.

Langdon looked up, having cinched the girth tight, and took a step toward the two men.

"Well, we both can't win," he said, half insolently; "an' I don't think there's anything out to-day'll beat Lauzanne."

"That mare'll beat him," retorted Porter, curtly, nettled by the other's cocksureness.

"I'll bet you one horse against the other, the winner to take. both," cried Langdon in a sneering, defiant tone.

"I've made my bets," said Lucretia's owner, quietly.

"I hear you had an offer of five thousand for your filly, Mr. Porter," half queried Crane.

"I did, and I refused it."

"And here's the one that'll beat her to-day, an' I'll sell him for half that," asserted the Trainer, putting his hand on Lauzanne's neck.

Exasperated by the persistent boastfulness of Langdon, Porter was angered into saying, "If he beats my mare, I'll give you that for him myself."

"Done!" snapped Langdon. "I've said it, an' I'll stick to it."

"I don't want the horse—" began Porter; but Langdon interrupted him.

"Oh, if you want to crawl—"

"I never crawl," said Porter fiercely. "I don't want your horse, but just to show you what I think of your chance of winning, I'll give you two thousand and a half if you beat my mare, no matter what wins the race."

"I think you'd better call this bargain off, Mr. Porter," remonstrated Crane.

"Oh, the bargain will be off," answered John Porter; "if I'm any judge, Lauzanne's running his race right here in the stall."

His practiced eye had summed up Lauzanne as chicken-hearted; the sweat was running in little streams down the big Chestnut's legs, and dripping from his belly into the drinking earth spit-spit, drip-drip; his

head was high held in nervous apprehension; his lips twitched, his flanks trembled like wind-distressed water, and the white of his eye was showing ominously.

Langdon cast a quick, significant, cautioning look at Crane as Porter spoke of the horse; then he said, "You're a fair judge, an' if you're right you get all the stuff an' no horse."

"I stand to my bargain whatever happens," Porter retorted.

At that instant the bugle sounded.

"Get up, Westley," Langdon said to his jockey, "they're going out."

As he lifted the boy to the saddle, the Trainer whispered a few concise directions.

"Hold him steady at the post," he muttered; "I've got him a bit on edge to-day. Get off in front and stay there; he's feelin' good enough to leave the earth. This'll be a matter of a couple of hundred to you if you win."

"All out! all out!" called the voice of the paddock official. "Number one!" then, "Come on you, Westley! they're all out."

The ten starters passed in stately procession from the green-swarded paddock through an open gate to the soft harrowed earth, gleaming pink-brown in the sunlight, of the course. How consciously beautiful the thoroughbreds looked! The long sweeping step; the supple bend of the fetlock as it gave like a wire spring under the weight of great broad quarters, all sinewy strength and tapered perfection; the stretch of gentle-curved neck, sweet-lined as a greyhound's, bearing a lean, bony head, set with two great jewels of eyes, in which were honesty and courage, and eager longing for the battle of strength and stamina, and stoutness of

heart; even the nostrils, with a red transparency as of silk, spread and drank eagerly the warm summer air that was full of the perfume of new-growing clover and green pasture-land.

Surely the spectacle of these lovely creatures, nearest to man in their thoughts and their desires, and superior in their honesty and truth, was a sight to gladden the hearts of kings. Of a great certainty it was a sport of kings; and also most certainly had it at times come into the hands of highway robbers.

Some such bitter thought as this came into the heart of John Porter as he stood and watched his beautiful brown mare, Lucretia, trailing with stately step behind the others. He loved good horses with all the fervor of his own strong, simple, honest nature. Their walk was a delight to him, their roaring gallop a frenzy of eager sensation. There was nothing in the world he loved so well. Yes—his daughter Allis. But just now he was thinking of Lucretia—Lucretia and her rival, the golden-haired chestnut, Lauzanne.

He passed through the narrow gate leading from the paddock to the Grand Stand. The gate keeper nodded pleasantly to him and said: "Hope you'll do the trick with the little mare, sir. I'm twenty years at the business, and I haven't got over my likin' for an honest horse and an honest owner yet."

There was covert insinuation of suspicion, albeit a kindly one, in the man's voice. The very air was full of the taint of crookedness; else why should the official speak of honesty at all? Everyone knew that John Porter raced to win.

He crossed the lawn and leaned against the course fence, to take a deciding look at the mare and the Chest-

nut as they circled past the stand in the little view-promenade which preceded the race.

His trained eye told him that Lauzanne was a grand-looking horse; big, well-developed shoulders reached back toward the huge quarters until the small racing saddle almost covered the short back. What great promise of weight-carrying was there!

He laughed a little at the irrelevance of this thought, for it was not a question of weight-carrying at all; two-year-olds at a hundred pounds in a sprint of only five furlongs. Speed was the great factor to be considered, and surely Lucretia outclassed the other in that way. The long, well-ribbed-up body, with just a trace of gauntness in the flank; the slim neck; the deep chest; the broad, flat canon bones, and the well-let-down hocks, giving a length of thigh like a greyhound's—and the thighs themselves, as John Porter looked at them under the tucked-up belly of the gentle mare, big, and strong, and full of a driving force that should make the others break a record to beat her.

From the inquisition of the owner's study Lucretia stood forth triumphant; neither the Chestnut nor anything else in the race could beat her. And Jockey McKay —Porter raised his eyes involuntarily, seeking for some occult refutation of the implied dishonesty of the boy he had trusted. He found himself gazing straight into the small shifty eyes of Lucretia's midget rider, and such a hungry, wolfish look of mingled cunning and cupidity was there that Porter almost shuddered. The insinuations of Mike Gaynor, and the other things that pointed at a job being on, hadn't half the force of the dishonesty that was so apparent in the tell-tale look of the morally irresponsible boy in whose hands he was so com-

pletely helpless. All the careful preparation of the mare, the economical saving, even to the self-denial of almost necessary things to the end that he might have funds to back her heavily when she ran; and the high trials she had given him when asked the question, and which had gladdened his heart and brought an exclamation of satisfaction from his phlegmatic trainer; the girlish interest of his daughter in the expected triumph —all these contingencies were as less than nothing should the boy, with the look of a demon in his eyes, not ride straight and honest.

Even then it was not too late to ask the Stewards to set McKay down, but what proof had he to offer that there was anything wrong? The boy's good name would be blasted should he, John Porter, say at the last minute that he did not trust him; and *perhaps* the lad was innocent. Race people were ready to cry out that a jockey was fixed—that there was something wrong, when their own judgment was at fault and they lost.

Suddenly Porter gave a cry of astonishment. "My God!" he muttered, "the boy has got spurs on. That'll set the mare clean crazy."

He turned to Dixon, who was at his elbow: "Why did you let McKay put on the steels?"

"I told him not to."

"He's got them on."

"They've got to come off," and the Trainer dashed up the steps to the Stewards. In two minutes he returned, a heavy frown on his face.

"Well?" queried Porter.

"I've made a mess of it," answered Dixon, sullenly. "It seems there's hints of a job on, an' the Stewards have got the wrong end of the stick."

"They refused to let the mare go back to the paddock?" queried Porter.

"Yes; an' one of them said that if trainers would stick closer to their horses, an' keep out of the bettin' ring, that the public'd get a better run for their money."

"I'm sorry, Andy," said Porter, consolingly.

"It's pretty tough on me, but it's worse on you, sir. That boy hadn't spurs when he weighed, an' there's the rankest kind of a job on, I'll take me oath."

"We've got to stand to it, Andy."

"That we have; we've just got to take our medicine like little men. Even if we make a break an' take McKay off there isn't another good boy left. If he jabs the little mare with them steels she'll go clean crazy."

"It's my fault, Andy. I guess I've saved and petted her a bit too much. But she never needed spurs—she'd break her heart trying without them."

"By God!" muttered Dixon as he went back to the paddock, "if the boy stops the mare he'll never get another mount, if I can help it. It's this sort of thing that kills the whole business of racing. Here's a stable that's straight from owner to exercise boy, and now likely to throw down the public and stand a chance of getting ruled off ourselves because of a gambling little thief that can spend the income of a prince. But after all it isn't his fault. I know who ought to be warned off if this race is fixed; but they won't be able to touch a hair of him; he's too damn slick. But his time'll come—God knows how many men he'll break in the meantime, though."

As John Porter passed Danby's box going up into the stand, the latter leaned over in his chair, touched him on the arm and said, "Come in and take a seat."

"I can't," replied the other man, "my daughter is up there somewhere."

"I've played the mare," declared Danby, showing Porter a memo written in a small betting book.

The latter started and a frown crossed his brown face.

"I'm sorry—I'm afraid it's no cinch."

"Five to two never is," laughed his friend. "But she's a right smart filly; she looks much the best of the lot. Dixon's got her as fit as a fiddle string. When you're done with that man you might turn him over to me, John."

"The mare's good enough," said Porter, "and I've played her myself—a stiffish bit, too; but all the same, if you asked me now, I'd tell you to keep your money in your pocket. I must go," he added, his eye catching the flutter of a race card which was waving to him three seats up.

"Here's a seat, Dad," cried the girl, cheeringly, lifting her coat from a chair she had kept for her father.

For an instant John Porter forgot all about Lucretia and her troubles. The winsome little woman had the faculty of always making him forget his trials; she had to the fullest extent that power so often found in plain faces. Strictly speaking, she wasn't beautiful—any man would have passed that opinion if suddenly asked the question upon first seeing her. Doubt of the excellence of this judgment might have crept into his mind after he had felt the converting influence of the blue-gray eyes that were so much like her father's; in them was the most beautiful thing in the world, an undoubted evidence of truth and honesty and sympathy. She was small and slender, but no one had ever likened her to a flower. There was apparent sinewy strength and vigor

in the small form. Her life, claimed by the open air, had its reward—the saddle is no cradle for weaklings. Bred in an atmosphere of racing, and surrounded as she had always been by thoroughbreds, Allis had grown up full of admiration for their honesty, and courage, and sweet temper.

III

In John Porter's home horse racing had no debasing effect. If a man couldn't race squarely—run to win every time—he had better quit the game, Porter had always asserted. He raced honestly and bet openly, without cant and without hypocrisy; just as a financier might have traded in stocks in Wall Street; or a farmer might plant his crops and trust to the future and fair weather to yield him a harvest in return.

So much of the racing life was on honor—so much of the working out of it was in the open, where purple-clovered fields gave rest, and health, and strength, that the home atmosphere was impregnated with moral truth, and courage, and frankness, in its influence on the girl's development.

Every twist of her sinewy figure bore mute testimony to this; every glance from her wondrous eyes was an eloquent substantiating argument in favor of the life she affected.

John Porter looked down at the small, rather dark, upturned face, and a half-amused smile of content came to his lips. "Did you see Lucretia?" he asked. "Isn't she a beauty? Hasn't Dixon got her in the pink of condition?"

"I saw nothing else, father." She beckoned to him with her eyes, tipped her head forward, and whispered: "Those people behind us have backed Lauzanne. I think they're racing folks."

The father smiled as an uncultured woman's voice from one row back jarred on his ear. Allis noticed the smile and its provocation, and said, speaking hastily, "I don't mean like you, father—"

"Like us," he corrected.

"Well, perhaps; they're more like betting or training people, though." She put her hand on his arm warningly, as a high-pitched falsetto penetrated the drone of their half-whispered words, saying, "I tell you Dick knows all about this Porter mare, Lucretia."

"But I like her," a baritone voice answered. "She looks a rattlin' filly."

"You'll dine off zwieback and by your lonely, Ned, if you play horses on their looks—"

"Or women either," the baritone cut in.

"You're a fair judge, Ned. But Dick told me to go the limit on Lauzanne, and to leave the filly alone."

"On form Lucretia ought to win," the man persisted; "an' there's never anythin' doin' with Porter."

"Perhaps not;" the unpleasant feminine voice sneered mockingly, with an ill-conditioned drawl on the "perhaps;" "but he doesn't ride his own mare, does he?"

John Porter started. Again that distasteful expression fraught with distrust and insinuation. There was a strong evil odor of stephanotis wafted to his nostrils as the speaker shook her fan with impatient decision. The perfume affected him disagreeably; it was like the exhalation of some noisome drug; quite in keeping with the covert insinuation of her words that Dick, as she called him—it must be Dick Langdon, the trainer of Lauzanne, Porter mused—had given her advice based on a knowledge quite irrespective of the galloping powers of the two horses.

"Did you hear that, father?" Allis whispered.

He nodded his head.

"What does it all mean?"

"It means, girl," he said, slowly, "that all the trouble and pains I have taken over Lucretia since she was foaled, two years ago, and her dam, the old mare, Maid of Rome, died, even to raising the little filly on a bottle, and watching over her temper that it should not be ruined by brutal savages of stable-boys, whose one idea of a horse is that he must be clubbed into submission—that all the care taken in her training, and the money spent for her keep and entries goes for nothing in this race, if Jockey McKay is the rascal I fear he is."

"You think some one has got at him, Dad?"

Her father nodded again.

"I wish I'd been a boy, so that I could have ridden Lucretia for you to-day," Allis exclaimed with sudden emphasis.

"I almost wish you had, Little Woman; you'd have ridden straight anyway—there never was a crooked one of our blood."

"I don't see why a jockey or anybody else should be dishonest—I'm sure it must take too much valuable time to cover up crooked ways."

"Yes, you'd have made a great jock, Little Woman," the father went on, musingly, as he watched the horses lining up for the start. "Men think if a boy is a feather-weight, and tough as a Bowery loafer, he's sure to be a success in the saddle. That's what beats me—a boy of that sort wouldn't be trusted to carry a letter with ten dollars in it, and on the back of a good horse he's piloting thousands. Unless a jockey has the instincts of a gentleman, naturally, he's almost certain to turn out

a blackguard sooner or later, and throw down his owner. He'll have more temptations in a week to violate his trust than a bank clerk would have in a lifetime."

"Is that why you put Alan in the bank, father?"

Porter went on as though he had not heard the daughter's query. "To make a first-class jock, a boy must have nerves of steel, the courage of a bulldog, the self-controlling honesty of a monk. You've got all these right enough, Allis, only you're a girl, don't you see—just a good little woman," and he patted her hand affectionately.

"They're off!" exclaimed the baritone.

"Not this trip," objected the falsetto.

"The spurs—the young fiend!" fiercely ejaculated John Porter.

"What is it, father?"

"The boy on Lucretia is jabbing her with the spurs, and she's cutting up."

"That's the fourth false start," said Ned, the baritone. "I don't think much of your Lauzanne, he's like a crazy horse."

Allis heard the woman's shrill voice, smothered to a hissing whisper, answer something. Two distinct words, "the hop," carried to her ears. There was a long-drawn-out baritone, Oh-h!" then, in the same key, "I knew Lauzanne was a sluggard, and couldn't make out why he was so frisky to-day."

"Dick's got it down fine"—just audibly from the woman; "Lauzanne'll try right enough this time out."

"The mare's actin' as if she'd a cup of tea, too," muttered her companion, Ned.

This elicited a dry chuckle from the woman.

Allis pinched her father's arm again, and looked up

in his face inquiringly, as from the seat behind them the jumbled conversation came to their ears. Porter nodded his head understandingly, and frowned. The stephanotis was choking his nostrils, and an occasional word was filling his heart with confirmation of his suspicions.

"I don't like it," he muttered to Allis. "They've had four breaks, and the mare's been left each time. The Chestnut's the worst actor I ever saw at the post. But I'm thinking he'll leave the race right there, the way he's cutting up."

"My God!" he exclaimed in the next breath. He had startled the girl with the fierce emphasis he threw into the words; she sprang to her feet in excitement.

A bell had clanged noisily, there was the shuffle of thousands of eager feet; a hoarse cry, "They're off!" went rolling from tier to tier, from seat to seat, to the topmost row of the huge stand.

"Lauzanne is off with a flying lead of three lengths, and the mare is left absolutely—absolutely last. The boy whipped her about just as the flag fell." There was the dreary monotone of crushed hope in Porter's voice as he spoke.

"Yes, we're out of it, Little Woman," he continued; and there was almost a tone of relief, of resignation. Suspense was gone; realization of the disaster seemed to have steadied his nerves again. Allis attempted to speak, but her low voice was hushed to a whisper by the exultant cries that were all about them.

"Didn't I tell you—Lauzanne wins in a walk!" the falsetto voice was an exultant squeak of hilarious excitement.

"You called the turn." Even Ned's baritone had

risen to a false-keyed tenor; he was standing on his toes, peering over the heads of taller men in front.

Allis brushed from her eyes the tears of sympathy that had welled into them, and, raising her voice, spoke bravely, clinging to the vain hope: "Lucretia is game, father—she may win yet—the race is not lost till they're past the post."

Then her voice died away, and she kept pleading over and over in her heart, "Come on Lucretia—come on, brave little mare! Is she gaining, father—can you see?"

"She'll never make it up," Porter replied, as he watched the jumble of red, and yellow, and black patterned into a trailing banner, which waved, and vibrated, and streamed in the glittering sunlight, a furlong down the Course—and the tail of it was his own blue, white-starred jacket. In front, still a good two lengths in front, gleamed scarlet, like an evil eye, the all red of Lauzanne's colors.

"Where is Lucretia, father?" the girl asked again, stretching her slight figure up in a vain endeavor to see over the shoulders of those in front.

"She had an opening there," Porter replied, speaking his thoughts more than answering the girl, "but the boy pulled her into the bunch on the rail. He doesn't want to get through. Oh!" he exclaimed, as though some one had struck him in the face.

"What's wrong? Has she—"

"It's the Minstrel. His boy threw him fair across Lucretia, and knocked her to her knees." He lowered his glasses listlessly. "It's Lauzanne all the way, if he lasts out. He's dying fast though, and Westley's gone to the whip."

He was looking through his glasses again. Though

beaten, his racing blood was up. "If Lauzanne wins it will be Westley's riding; the Hanover colt, The Dutchman, is at his quarter. He'll beat him out, for the Hanovers are all game."

"Come on you, Lauzanne!" Even the exotic stephanotis failed to obliterate the harsh, mercenary intensity of the feminine cry at the back of Allis.

"He's beat!" a deep discordant voice groaned. "I knew he was a quitter;" the woman's companion was pessimistic.

Like trees of a forest, swayed by strong compelling winds, the people rocked in excitement, tiptoed and craned eager necks, as they watched the magnificent struggle that was drawing to a climax in the stretch. Inch by inch the brave son of Hanover was creeping up on Lauzanne. How loosely the big Chestnut galloped—rolling like a drunken man in the hour of his distress. Close pressed to his neck, flat over his wither lay the intense form of his rider—a camel's hump—a part of the racing mechanism, unimpeding the weary horse in the masterly rigidity of his body and legs; but the arms, even the shoulders of the great jockey thrust his mount forward, always forward—forward at each stride; fairly lifting him, till the very lurches of Lauzanne carried him toward the goal. And at his girth raced the compact bay son of Hanover; galloping, galloping with a stout heart and eager reaching head; straining every sinew, and muscle, and nerve; in his eye the brave desire, not to be denied.

Ah, gallant little bay! On his back was the offspring of unthinking parents—a pin-head. Perhaps the Evil One had ordained him to the completion of Langdon's villainy with Lauzanne. At the pinch his judgment had

flown—he was become an instrument of torture; with whip and spur he was throwing away the race. Each time he raised his arm and lashed, his poor foolish body swayed in the saddle, and The Dutchman was checked.

"Oh, if he would but sit still!" Porter cried, as he watched the equine battle.

The stand mob clamored as though Nero sat there and lions had been loosed in the arena. The strange medley of cries smote on the ears of Allis. How like wild beasts they were, how like wolves! She closed her eyes, for she was weary of the struggle, and listened. Yes, they were wolves leaping at the throat of her father, and joying in the defeat of Lucretia. Deep-throated howls from full-chested wolves: "Come on you, Lauzanne! On, Westley, on! The Bay wins! The Dutchman—The Dutchman for a thousand!"

"I'll take—"

But the new voice was stilled into nothingness by the shrill, re-awakening falsetto. "Go on, Westley! Lauzanne wins—wins—wins!" it seemed to repeat. Allis sank back into her seat. She knew it was all over. The shuffle of many feet hastening madly, the crash of eager heels down the wooden steps, a surging, pushing, as the wolf-pack blocked each passage in its thirstful rush for the gold it had won, told her that the race was over.

No one knew which horse had won. Presently a quiet came over the mob like a lull in a storm. Silently they waited for the winning number to go up.

"I believe it's a dead heat," said Porter; and Allis noted how calm and restful his voice sounded after the exultant babel of the hoarse-throated watchers.

"Where was Lucretia, father?"

"Third," he answered, laconically, schooling his voice

to indifference. "I hope it's a dead heat, for if Lauzanne gets the verdict I've got to take him. I don't want him after that run; they made him a present of the race at the start, and he only just squeezed home."

"Why must you take the horse, father, if you don't want him? I don't understand."

"I suppose there's no law for it—I said I would, that's all. The whole thing is crooked though; they stole the race from Lucretia and planted me with a dope horse, and hanged if I don't feel like backing out. Let Langdon go before the Stewards about the sale if he dare."

"Did you give your word that you'd buy the horse, father?"

"I did; but it was a plant."

"Then you'll take him, father. People say that John Porter's word is as good as his bond; and that sounds sweeter in my ears than if I were to hear them say that you were rich, or clever, or almost anything."

"Lauzanne gets it!" called the eager grating voice behind them. "There go the numbers, Ned—three, five, ten; Lauzanne, The Dutchman, Lucretia. I knew it. Dick don't make no mistakes when he's out for blood."

"He drew it a bit fine that time," growled Ned, still in opposition; "it was the closest sort of a shave."

"Hurrah, Lauzanne!"

Again there was more hurrying of feet as the Chestnut's backers who had waited in the stand for the Judge's decision, hurried down to the gold mart.

"You'll take Lauzanne, father," Allis said, when the tumult had stilled; "it will come out right somehow—I know it will—he'll win again."

John Porter stood irresolutely for a minute, not answering the girl, as though he were loath to go close to

the contaminating influence that seemed part and parcel of Lauzanne, and which was stretching out to envelop him. He was thinking moodily that he had played against a man who used loaded dice, and had lost through his own rashness. He had staked so much on the race that the loss would cut cripplingly into his affairs.

"I guess you're right, Allis," he said; "a man's got to keep his word, no matter what happens. I never owned a dope horse yet, and unless I'm mistaken this yellow skate is one to-day. I'll take him though, girl; but he'll get nothing but oats from me to make him gallop."

Then Porter went resolutely down the steps, smothering in his heart the just rebellion that was tempting him to repudiate his bargain.

As he reached the lawn, a lad swung eagerly up the steps, threw his eye inquiringly along row after row of seats until it stopped at Allis. Then he darted to her side.

"Hello, Sis—been looking for you. Where's Dad?"

"Gone to get Lauzanne."

"Lauzanne!" and the boy's eyes that were exactly like her own, opened wide in astonishment.

"Yes; father bought him."

"The deuce! I say, Allis, that won't do. Don't you know there's something wrong about this race? I just saved myself. I backed the little mare for a V—then I heard something. This Langdon's a deuce of a queer fish, I can tell you. I wonder Crane has anything to do with him, for the Boss is straight as they make them."

"Did you back Lauzanne then, Alan?"

"You bet I did; quick, too; and was hunting all over for the gov'nor to tell him. You see, I know Langdon—

he comes to the bank sometimes. He's that slick he'll hardly say 'Good-day,' for fear of giving something away."

"Then how did you—how did people know there was something wrong?"

"Oh, a woman, of course—she blabbed. I think she's Dick Langdon's sister, and—"

"Hush-hh!" and Allis laid her hand on the boy's arm, indicating with her eyes the woman in the seat behind.

"I'd better go and tell father—"

"You needn't bother; he knows. It's a question of honor. Father said he'd buy the horse, and he's gone to make good."

"I wouldn't; that sort of thing will break a man."

"It's a good way to go broke, Alan. Perhaps we'd all be richer if it wasn't so strong in the Porter blood; but all the same, brother, you do just as father is doing to-day—always keep your word. I tell you what it is, boy"—and her face lighted up as she spoke—"father is a hero—that's what he is; he's just the biggest, bravest man ever lived. He couldn't do a mean act. How did you get away from the bank, Alan?" she said, changing the subject; "I didn't know you were coming to-day."

"Mortimer was light, and took on my work. He's a good sort."

"Does he bet?"

The boy laughed. "Mortimer bet? That's rich. We call him 'Old Solemnity' in the bank; but he doesn't mean any harm by it—he just can't help it, that's all. If he had a stiff ruff about his neck, you could pose him for a picture of one of those old Dutch burgomasters."

"He's doing your work, and you're making fun of him, boy."

"You can't make fun of him, at him, or with him; he's a grave digger; but you can trust him."

"That's better."

"If I'd killed a man and needed a friend to help me out, I'd go straight to Mortimer; he's got that kind of eyes. Do you know why he's doing my work to-day?"

"Because you're away, I suppose."

"Because you recited that doggerel about The Run of Crusader."

"Alan! I've never spoken to Mr. Mortimer."

"That's why he choked the butcher the night of the concert—I mean—"

"You're talking nonsense, Alan."

"I'm not, I know when a man's interested. Hello. Blest if the Boss isn't coming this way—there's Crane. See, Allis? I've a notion to tell him that his trainer is a crook."

"No, you won't, Alan—you're too young to gabble."

Philip Crane had evidently intended going higher up in the stand, but his eye lighting on the brother and sister, he stopped, and turned in to where they were sitting.

"Good afternoon, Miss Porter."

Allis started. Was the stand possessed of unpleasant voices? There was a metallic ring in Crane's voice that affected her disagreeably. He was almost a stranger to her; she hardly remembered ever having spoken to him.

He turned and nodded pleasantly to Alan, saying, "May I take this seat? I'm tired. The Cashier let you off for the day, eh?" he continued. "Came up to see your father's mare run, I suppose—I'm deuced sorry she was beaten."

"What are they waiting for—why have they taken the

horses' numbers down again? Are they trying to steal the race from Lauzanne now?" It was the woman's voice behind them, petulantly exclaiming.

Crane turned in his seat, looked over his shoulder, and raised his hat.

"The impatient lady is my trainer's sister," he explained in a modulated tone to Allis. "A trainer is quite an autocrat, I assure you, and one must be very careful not to forget any of the obvious courtesies."

Allis wondered why he should find it necessary to make any explanation at all.

"I want to thank you, Miss Porter, for that reading about Crusader."

Allis's eyes opened wide.

"Yes, I was there," Crane added, answering the question that was in them.

As he said this a man came hurriedly up the steps, spoke to a policeman on guard, and searched the faces with his eyes. Catching sight of Crane, he came quickly forward and whispered something in his ear.

"Excuse me, I must go—I'm wanted," Crane said to Allis.

As he turned, the Trainer's sister spoke to him.

"What's the matter, Mr. Crane—there's something going on up in the Stewards' Stand?"

"I fancy there's an objection, though I don't know anything about it," he answered, as he went down the steps with the messenger.

Allis breathed more freely when he had gone. Somehow his presence had oppressed her; perhaps it was the fierce stephanotis that came in clouds from the lady behind that smothered her senses. Crane had said nothing—just an ordinary compliment. Like an inspira-

tion it came to the girl what had affected her so disagreeably in Crane—it was his eyes. They were hard, cold, glittering gray eyes, looking out from between partly closed eyelids. Allis could see them still. The lower lids cut straight across; it was as though the eyes were peeping at her over a stone wall.

"What did I tell you about Crusader?" Alan said, triumphantly. "There's another."

"Alan!"

"I wondered why Mr. Crane was so deuced friendly; but there's nothing to get cross about, girl, he's a fine old chap, and got lots of wealth."

He leaned forward till he was close to his sister's ear, and added, in a whisper, "Her ladyship behind, Belle Langdon, is trying to hook him. Phew!—but she's loud. But I'm off—I'm going to see what the row is about."

IV

WHEN John Porter left the stand, the horses had just cantered back to weigh in. The jockeys, one after another, with upraised whip, had saluted the Judge, received his nod to dismount, pulled the saddles from their steeds, and, in Indian file, were passing over the scales. As Lucretia was led away, Porter turned into the paddock. He saw that Langdon was waiting for him.

"Well, he won, just as I said he would," declared the latter; "you've got a good horse cheap. You'd ought to've had a bet down on him, an' won him out."

"He won," answered Porter, looking straight into the other's shifty eyes, "but he's a long way from being a good horse—no dope horse is a good horse."

"What're you givin' me?" demanded Langdon, angrily.

"Just what every blackguard ought to have—the truth."

"By God!" the Trainer began, in fierce blasphemy, but John Porter took a step nearer, and his gray eyes pierced the other man's soul until it shriveled like a dried leaf, and turned its anger into fear.

"Oh, if you want to crawl—if you don't want to take Lauzanne—"

But Porter again interrupted Langdon—"I said I'd take the horse, and I will; but don't think that you're fooling me, Mr. Langdon. You're a blackguard of the

first water. Thank God, there are only a few parasites such as you are racing—it's creatures like you that give the sport a black eye. If I can only get at the bottom of what has been done to-day, you'll get ruled off, and you'll stay ruled off. Now turn Lauzanne over to Andy Dixon, and come into the Secretary's office, where I'll give you a check for him."

"Well, we'll settle about the horse now, an' there'll be somethin' to settle between us, John Porter, at some other time and some other place," blustered Langdon, threateningly.

Porter looked at him with a half-amused, half-tolerant expression on his square face, and said, speaking in a very dry convincing voice: "I guess the check will close out all deals between us; it will pay you to keep out of my way, I think."

As they moved toward the Secretary's office, Porter was accosted by his trainer.

"The Stewards want to speak to you, sir," said Dixon.

"All right. Send a boy over to this man's stable for Lauzanne—I've bought him."

The Trainer stared in amazement.

"I'll give you the check when I come back," Porter continued, speaking to Langdon.

"There's trouble on, sir," said Dixon, as they moved toward the Stewards' box.

"There always is," commented Porter, dryly.

"The Stewards think Lucretia didn't run up to her form. They've had me up, an' her jock, McKay, is there now. Starter Carson swears he couldn't get her away from the post—says McKay fair anchored the mare. He fined the boy fifty dollars at the start."

"I think they've got the wrong pig by the ear—why

don't they yank Langdon? he's at the bottom of it. It's pretty rich, Andy, isn't it? They hit me heavy over the race, and now they'd like to rule me off for that thief's work," and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Langdon.

"Yes, racin's hell now," commented Dixon with laconic directness. "It seems just no use workin' over a good horse when any mut of a crook who is takin' a turn at plungin' can get at the boy. I believe Boston Bill's game of gettin' a straight boy to play, an' lettin' the horses go hang, is the proper racket."

"Yes, a good boy is better than a good horse nowadays; but they're like North Poles—hard to come by."

"Some mug give the Stewards a yarn that you'd bought Lauzanne, sir, an' sez that's why you didn't win with the mare."

Porter stopped, and gasped in astonishment. What next?

"You see," continued Dixon, apologetically, "I didn't know you was meanin' to buy that skate, so I says it was all a damned lie."

"Things are mixed, Andy, ain't they?"

"I didn't know, sir—"

"Of course not—I didn't mention it to you—it was all a fluke. But I don't blame you, Andy. I'll go and talk to the Stewards—they're all right; they only want to get at the truth of it."

As Porter went up the steps of the Stewards' Stand, he felt how like a man mounting a scaffold he was, an innocent man condemned to be hanged for another's crime.

The investigation had been brought about by a note

one of the Stewards had received. The sender of the missive stated in it that he had backed Lucretia heavily, but had strong reasons for believing there was a job on. The backer was a reliable man and asked for a fair run for his money. The note had come too late—just as the horses were starting—to be of avail, except as a corroboration of the suspicious features of the race. Starter Carson's evidence as to McKay's handling of the mare coincided with the contents of the note. Then there was the fact of Porter's having bought Lauzanne. The Stewards did not know the actual circumstances of the sale, but had been told that Lucretia's owner had acquired the Chestnut before the race. Where all was suspicion, every trivial happening was laid hold of; and Alan's trifling bet on Lauzanne had been magnified into a heavy plunge—no doubt the father's money had been put up by the boy. A race course is like a household, everything is known, absolutely everything.

Porter was aghast. Were all the Furies in league against him? He was more or less a believer in lucky and unlucky days, but he had never experienced anything quite so bad as this. He, the one innocent man in the transaction, having lost almost his last dollar, and having been saddled with a bad horse, was now accused of being the perpetrator of the villainy; and the insinuation was backed up by such a mass of circumstantial evidence. No wonder he flushed and stood silent, lost for words to express his indignation.

"Speak up, Mr. Porter," said the Steward, kindly. "Those that lost on Lucretia are swearing the mare was pulled."

"And they're right," blurted out Porter. "I know what the mare can do; she can make hacks of that bunch.

She was stopped, and interfered with, and given all the worst of it from start to finish; but my money was burnt up with the public's. I never pulled a horse in my life, and I'm too old to begin now."

"I believe that," declared the Steward, emphatically. "I've known you, John Porter, for forty years, man and boy, and there never was anything crooked. But we've got to clear this up. Racing isn't what it used to be—it's on the square now, and we want the public to understand that."

"What does the boy say," asked Porter; "you've had him up?"

"He says the mare was 'helped;' that she ran like a drunken man—swayed all over the course, and he couldn't pull her together at all."

"Does he mean she was doped?"

"You've guessed it," answered the Steward, laconically.

"That's nonsense, sir; and he knows it. Why, the little mare is as sweet as a lamb, and as game a beast as ever looked through a bridle. Somebody got at the boy. I can prove by Dixon that Lucretia never had a grain of cocaine in her life—never even a bracer of whiskey—she doesn't need it; and as for the race, I hadn't a cent on Lauzanne."

"But your son—"

"He had a small bet; I didn't know that, even, until they were running."

"Did you tell him not to back Lucretia, for he did Lauzanne?"

"I told him not to bet at all."

"And you played the mare yourself?"

For answer Porter showed the Steward his race pro-

gramme, on which was written the wager he had made on Lucretia, and the bookmaker's name.

"Ask Ullmer to bring his betting sheet," the Steward said to an assistant.

On the sheet, opposite John Porter's badge number, was a bet, $10,000 to $4,000, in the Lucretia column.

"Did this gentleman make that bet with you?" the Steward asked of Ullmer.

"He carries the number; besides I know Mr. Porter—I remember laying it to him."

"Thank you, that will do. Hit you pretty hard," he said, turning to Porter. "And you hadn't a saver on Lauzanne?"

"Not a dollar."

"What about your buying him—is there anything in that story?"

Porter explained the purchase. The Steward nodded his head.

"They seem to have been pretty sure of winning, those other people," he commented; "but we can't do anything to them for winning; nor about selling you the horse, I fear; and as far as you're concerned, Lucretia was supposed to be trying. Who gave your jockey orders?"

"Dixon. I don't interfere; he trains the horses."

"We'd like to have Dixon up here again for a minute. I'm sorry we've had to trouble you, Mr. Porter; I can see there is not the slightest suspicion attaches to you."

In answer to the Steward's query about the order to McKay, Dixon said: "I told McKay the boss had a big bet down, and to make no mistake—no Grand Stand finish for me. I told him to get to the front as soon as

he could, and stay there, and win by as far as he liked. I got the office that there'd be somethin' doin' in the race, an' I told him to get out by himself."

After Dixon was dismissed, the Stewards consulted for a minute, with the result that McKay was suspended for the balance of the meeting, pending a further investigation into his methods.

. . . . . .

During the carpeting of Porter and Dixon, a sea of upturned faces, furrowed by lines of anxious interest, had surrounded the Judge's box. Wave on wave the living waters reached back over the grassed lawn to the betting ring. An indefinable feeling that something was wrong had crept into the minds of the waiting people, tense with excitement.

As the horses had flashed past the post, and, after a brief wait for decision, Lauzanne's number had gone up, his backers had hastened eagerly to the money mart, and lined up in waiting rows behind the bookmakers' stands. There they waited, fighting their impatient souls into submission, for the brief wait would end in the acquiring of gold. Why did not the stentorian-voiced crier send through the ring the joyful cry of "All right!" The minutes went by, and the delay became an age. A whisper vibrated the throng, as a breeze stirs slender branches, that the winner had been disqualified—that there had been an objection. First one dropped out of line; then another; one by one, until all stood, an army of expectant speculators, waiting for the verdict that had its birthplace up in that tiny square building, the Stewards' Stand.

"It's over the pulling of Lucretia," a man said, simply to relieve his strained feelings.

"It was the most barefaced job I ever saw," declared another; "it's even betting the stable gets ruled off." He had backed Porter's mare, and was vindictive.

"Not on your life," sneered a Tout, wolfishly; "a big owner always gets off. The jock'll get it in the neck if they've been caught."

"Why don't they pay?" whined the fourth. "What's the pulling of the mare got to do with it? The best horse won." He was a backer of Lauzanne.

"Bet yer life the bookies won't part till the numbers of the placed horses an' riders are up on that board again. They've run them down, don't you see?" chimed in the Tout.

"I'll take two to one The Dutchman gets it," said a backer of that horse. "There's a job on, and they'll both get disqualified. Porter's kid won ten thousand over Lauzanne, and that's why they stiffened the mare."

"That's what the Public are up against in this game," sneered the backer of Lucretia.

"And the jock'll have to stand the shot; I know how it goes," asserted the Tout.

"You ought to know," drawled Lauzanne's backer. The racing men within earshot smiled, for the Tout had been a jockey before his license had been taken away for crooked work.

"Hello! here it comes," cried Lauzanne's backer, as a fat, red-faced man came swiftly down from the Stewards' Stand, ran to the betting ring, and pushing his way through the crowd, called with the roar of a gorilla: "Al-l-l right! Lauzanne, first! The Dutchman, second! Lucretia, third! They're al-l-l weighed in!"

A Niagara of human beings poured from the lawn to

the ring; they ran as though the course was on fire and they sought to escape.

"What about Lucretia?" some one asked.

"They've broke McKay," the red-faced crier answered; "suspended him."

"What did I tell you?" sneered the Tout, maliciously; "it's the under dog gets the worst of it every time."

. . . . . .

A Celt is an outspoken man when the prod of his hot temper has loosened his tongue, and Mike Gaynor was a Celt in excess.

The injustice that had come to his benefactor, John Porter, had stirred a tempest in his Irish soul. A fierce exclamation of profane wrath had gone up from him as he watched the bad start from over the paddock rail.

A misguided retribution led Starter Carson to pass from the Judges' Stand after the race, along the narrow passage between the Club Stand and the course, to the paddock gate. There he met Mike, who forthwith set to flailing him.

"Did ye notice a little mare called Lucretia in that race, Mr. Carson—did ye see anythin' av her at all down at the post?"

Carson's eyes twinkled uneasily. Years of starting had taught him that self-control was nine out of ten rules which should govern the Starter's actions.

"Was there anythin' th' mather wit' yer ancestor's eyes that ye come by, Mister Carson?"

The Starter made answer with a smile of good-humored tolerance. But Mike was only warming up; the hot blood was stinging his quick brain, and his sharp tongue galloped on with unbridled irresponsibility. With the deep pathos of scorn he continued:

"Ye'r Carson the Stharter—Mister Carson! S'help me, Bob! ye couldn't sthart a sthreet car down hill wit' bot' brakes off!"

Carson ceased to smile; the smile had passed to other faces, the owners of which were listening with fiendish delight to the castigation.

Some one touched Mike on the arm, saying, "Come over into the paddock, Gaynor; you're barkin' up the wrong tree." It was Dixon.

"Bot' t'umbs up! This game's too tough fer me—I'll ship me plugs to Gravesend. Whin a straight man like Porther gets a deal av this kind—"

"Never mind, Mike," interrupted Dixon; "let it drop."

Carson opened his lips to retort, then closed them tight, set his square jaw firmly, turned on his heel, and walked away.

"What d' ye think av it, b'ys?" appealed Mike to the others.

"You're wrong, Gaynor," declared a thin, tall, hawk-faced man, who was in his shirt sleeves; "my boy was in that run, and it isn't Carson's fault at all. It's dope, Mike. Lauzanne was fair crazy with it at the post; and McKay was dead to the world on the little mare—the Starter couldn't get him away."

"That's right, Mike," added Dixon; "Carson fined the boy fifty, an' the Stewards set him down."

"Is that straight goods?" asked Gaynor, losing confidence in the justice of his wordy assault.

"Yes, you're wrong, Mike," they all asserted.

In five minutes Gaynor had found Carson, and apologized with the full warmth of a penitent Irishman.

V

For a week John Porter brooded over Lucretia's defeat, and, worse still, over the unjust suspicion of the unthinking public. Touched in its pocket, the public responded in unsavory references to Lucretia's race. Porter loved a good horse, and liked to see him win. The confidence of the public in his honesty was as great a reward as the stakes. The avowed principle of racing, that it improved the breed of horses, was but a silent sentiment with him. He believed in it, but not being rich, raced as a profession, honestly and squarely. He had asserted more than once that if he were wealthy he would never race a two-year-old. But his income must be derived from his horses, his capital was in them; and just at this time he was sitting in a particularly hard streak of bad luck; financially, he was in a hole; morally, he stood ill with the public.

His reason told him that the ill-fortune could not last; he had one great little mare, good enough to win, an honest trainer—there the inventory stopped short; his stock in trade was incomplete—he had not a trusty jockey. In his dilemma he threshed it out with Dixon.

"How's the mare doing, Andy?" he asked. "What did the race do to her?"

"She never was better in her life," the Trainer answered, proudly. Then he added, to ease the troubled look that was in the gray eyes of his master, "She'll win next time out, sir—I'll gamble my shirt on that."

"Not with another McKay up."

"I think she's good enough for the 'Eclipse,' sir, dashed if I don't. I worked her the distance, and she shaded the time they made last year."

"What's the use," said Porter, dejectedly; "where'll we get a boy?"

"Oh, lots of the boys are straight."

"I know that," Porter answered, "but all the straight ones are tied hand and foot to the big stables."

"I've been thinkin' it over," hazarded Dixon, tentatively—"Boston Bill's got a good lad—there's none of them can put it over him, an' his boss ain't got nothin' in the 'Eclipse,' I know."

"That means the same old game, Andy; we nurse the horse, get him into condition, place him where he can win, and then turn him over to a plunger and take the small end of the divide. Boston Bill would back her off the boards.

"The stake'd mount up to seven or eight thousand, an' the win would square the little mare with the public."

"And I'd do that, if I didn't land a dollar," said Porter. "Andy, it hurt me more to see the filly banged about there in the ruck than it did giving up the money."

The Trainer smiled. With him this was unusual; there was a popular superstition that he never smiled except when one of his horses won. But his heart expanded at Porter's words, for he, too, was fond of the little mare.

Then Porter spoke again, abruptly, and fast, as though he feared he might change his mind: "They downed me last trip, Dixon—I guess I'm getting a bit slow in my paces; and you do just as you like—arrange

with Boston Bill if you think it's good business. He makes a specialty of winning races—not pulling horses, and we need a win, too, I guess."

"Thank you, sir. We'll land that stake; an' p'raps the sharp division'll take a tumble. I'll bet a dollar they'll go for The Dutchman—he ran a great race the other day, an' he's in the Eclipse—if they start him. Lurcetia's right on edge, she's lookin' for the key hole, an' may go back if we don't give her a race. We'd better get the money for the oat bill while it's in sight. She oughter be a long price in the bettin', too," continued Dixon, meditatively; "the public soon sour on a beaten horse. You'll have a chance to get even."

"I don't like that part of it," muttered Porter; "I'm in the black books now. People have no reason at all—no sense; they've got it into their heads that dirty job was of my making, and if the filly starts at ten to one, and I win a bit, they'll howl."

"You can't make a success of racin', sir, an' run your stable for the public—they don't pay the feed bill."

"Perhaps you're right, Dixon," answered Porter.

For immediate financial relief Porter knew that he must look to Lucretia—no other horse in his stable was ready to win; but more immediately he must arrange certain money matters with his banker, who was Philip Crane. To Porter, Crane had been a tolerant financier, taking the man's honesty liberally as a security; not but what Ringwood had been called upon as a tangible asset. So that day, following his conversation with Dixon, the master of Ringwood had an interview with his banker. It was natural that he should speak of his prospects—his hopes of winning the Eclipse with Lucretia, and, corroboratively, mention her good trial.

"I think that's a good mare of yours, Mr. Porter," said Crane, sympathetically. I only race, myself in a small way, just for the outdoor relaxation it gives me, you know, so I'm not much of a judge. The other horse you bought—the winner of the race, I mean, Lauzanne—will also help put you right, I should say."

Porter hesitated, uneasily. He disliked to talk about a man behind his back, but he knew that Langdon trained for Crane, and longed to give the banker a friendly word of warning; he knew nothing of the latter's manipulation of the trainer.

With a touch of rustic quaintness he said, with seeming irrelevance to the subject, "Have you ever picked wild strawberries in the fields, Mr. Crane?"

"I have," answered the other man, showing no surprise at the break, for life in Brookfield had accustomed him to disjointed deals.

"Did you ever notice that going down wind you could see the berries better?"

Crane thought for a moment. "Yes, that's right; coming up wind the leaves hid them."

"Just so," commented Porter; "and when a man's got a trainer he's nearly always working up wind with him."

"The trainer hides things?" queried Crane.

"Some do. But the outsiders walking down wind see the berries."

And the Banker pondered for a minute, then he said, "Whose garden are the berries in, Mr. Porter, yours or mine?"

"Well, you've always been a good friend of mine, Mr. Crane," Porter answered, evasively.

"I see," said the other, meditatively; "I understand.

I'm much obliged. If I thought for an instant that any trainer wasn't dealing perfectly straightforward with me, I'd have nothing more to do with him—nothing whatever."

Crane sat looking through the open window at John Porter as the latter went down the street. About his thin-lipped, square-framed mouth hovered an expression that might have been a smile, or an intense look of interest, or a touch of avaricious ferocity. The gray eyes peeped over the wall of their lower lids, and in them, too, was the unfathomable something.

"Yes," he repeated, as though Porter still stood beside him, "if Langdon tried to deceive me, I'd crush him. Poor old Porter with his story of the strawberries! If he were as clever as he is honest, he wouldn't have been stuck with a horse like Lauzanne. I told Langdon to get rid of that quitter, but I almost wish he'd found another buyer for him. The horse taint is pretty strong in that Porter blood. How the girl said that line,

'And a hush came over the clamorous mob;
Like a babe on his neck I was sobbing.'

She's cleverer than her father."

Crane sat for an hour. Porter had vanished from the landscape, but still the Banker's thoughts clung to his personality as though the peeping eyes saw nothing else.

From the time of the first loan obtained upon Ringwood, Crane had coveted the place. It appealed to him with its elm-bordered, sweeping driveway, leading from gate to old colonial residence. Its thick-grassed fields and running water made it just the place for a man who tempered his passion for racing with common sense. And it would pass from Porter's hands right enough—

Crane knew that. Porter might call it ill luck, but he, Crane the Banker, knew it was the lack of something, the inability to make money.

"Made music to me on Crusader." Yes, that was it. With the Porters it was jingle of spurs, and stride of the horse. All very fine in theory, but racing, as he looked at it, was a question of proper odds, and many other things connected with the betting ring.

Why did the girl, Allis, with her jingling verse creep into his mind. Perhaps it was because she was so different from the woman who was always steeped in stephanotis. Of the one there was only the memory of an unmodulated voice and oppressive perfume; in truth, of the other there was not much more—just a pair of big, blue-gray, honest eyes, that somehow stared at him fearlessly, and withal with a great sweetness.

Crane suddenly chuckled in dry disapprobation of himself. Grotesquely enough, all at once he remembered that he was forty—that very day forty. He ran his hand over his waistcoat, dipped two fingers into the pocket and drew out a cigar. Ordinarily the face of an alabaster Buddha was mobile and full of expression compared with Crane's. His mind worked behind a mask, but it worked with the clean-cut precision of clockwork. When his thoughts had crystallized into a form of expression, Crane was very apt to be exactly right in his deductions.

Save for the curling smoke that streamed lazily upward from his cigar one might have thought the banker fast asleep in his chair, so still he sat, while his mind labored with the quiescent velocity of a spinning top. He had won a big stake over Lauzanne's victory. The race had helped beggar Porter, and brought Ring-

wood nearer his covetous grasp. If Porter failed to win the Eclipse, his finances would be in a pitiable state; he might even have to sell his good filly Lucretia. That would be a golden opportunity.

From desiring the farm, insensibly Crane drifted into coveting the mare. He fell to wondering whether The Dutchman might not beat Lucretia. A question of this sort was one of the few he discussed with Langdon. Crane had smoked his cigar out, had settled the trend of many things, and developed the routine for his chessmen.

"I'll give Porter rope enough, in the way of funds, to tangle himself, and in the meantime I'll run up to New York and see what Langdon thinks about The Dutchman," was the shorthand record of his thoughts as he threw away the end of his cigar, took his hat, and passed out of the bank.

That evening he talked with his trainer.

"What should win the Eclipse, Langdon?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know what'll start," began the Trainer, with diplomatic caution, running over in his mind the most likely two-year-olds.

"Would Porter's mare have a chance?"

"I think she would. I hear somethin' about a trial she gave them good enough to win—if I could find out her time—Porter don't talk much, an' Andy Dixon's like a clam. There's a boy in the stable, Shandy, that I might pump—"

"Don't bother, Mr. Langdon; I dislike prying into anybody's business."

The Trainer stared, but he didn't know that Porter had told Crane all about the trial, and so the latter could afford to take a virtuous pose.

"Has The Dutchman a look in?" continued Crane.

"On his runnin' he has; he wasn't half fit, an' got as bad a ride as ever I see in my life. The race ought to be between 'em—I ain't seen no two-year-olds out to beat that pair."

"If I thought The Dutchman would win I'd buy him. I like game horses, and men, too—that'll take the gaff and try."

"I don't know as the owner'd sell him."

"Do you remember the buying of Silver Foot, Langdon?"

"Yes."

"He was a good horse."

"The best handicap horse in the country, an' he was sold for a song—seven thousand."

"Less than that, the first time," corrected Crane.

"Yes, they stole him from old Walters; made him believe the horse was no good."

"Just so," commented Crane; "I've heard that story," and his smooth, putty-like face remained blank and devoid of all meaning, as his eyes peered vacantly over their lower lids at the Trainer.

Langdon waited for the other to continue, but the Banker seemed wrapped up in a retrospect of the Silver Foot deal.

"I know Billy Smith, that trains The Dutchman," hazarded Langdon; "he's a boozer."

"I'm glad of that—I mean, that you know Smith," declared Crane. "I happen to know the owner—his name is Baker. His racing is what might be called indiscriminate, and like men of that class he sometimes blunders upon a good horse without knowing it; and I doubt very much but that if he knew all about the other

race—how bad Lauzanne really is; how the mare, Lucretia—well—got shut off, and couldn't get through her horses, say—of course his own trainer, Smith, would have to tell these things, you understand. In fact, if he knew the exact truth, he might take a reasonable offer for The Dutchman."

Langdon nodded approvingly. He loved his subtle master; cards up his sleeves tingled his nerves, and loaded dice were a joy for evermore.

Crane proceeded to unwind the silken cord. "Naturally Smith would hate to lose a fair horse out of his stable, and would, perhaps, attempt to thwart any deal; so I think you might remunerate him for his loss."

"When Silver Foot was sold, they gave him a bad trial before the sale—"

"I'm not interested in Silver Foot," interrupted Crane; "and I shouldn't like to have anything—well, I don't want my name associated with anything shady, you understand, Langdon? You are to buy The Dutchman as cheap as you can, and run him as your own horse in the Eclipse. I think Porter's mare will win it, so we needn't lose anything over The Dutchman."

Langdon started. With all his racing finesse he was a babe. The smooth, complacent-faced man in front of him made him realize this.

"But," he gasped, "there was a row over Lauzanne's race. If The Dutchman runs in my name, an' a lot o' mugs play him—it's dollars to doughnuts they will—an' he gets beat, there'll be a kick. I can't take no chances of bein' had up by the Stewards."

"Wait a bit," replied Crane, calmly. "Supposing Porter's mare worked five and a half furlongs in 1.07, how would she go in the Eclipse?"

"She'd win in a walk; unless The Dutchman was at his best when he might give her an argument."

"Well, if I thought The Dutchman could beat the mare, I'd make him win, if he never carried the saddle again," declared Crane, almost fiercely. Then he interrupted himself, breaking off abruptly. Very seldom indeed it was that Crane gave expression to sentiment; his words were simply a motor for carrying the impact of his well-thought-out plans to the executive agents.

"It will be doing Porter a good turn to—to—that is, if Lucretia wins. I fancy he needs a win. Bad racing luck will hardly stop the mare this time—not twice in succession you know, Langdon," and he looked meaningly at his jackal. "You buy The Dutchman, and be good to him."

He laid marked emphasis on the words "be good to him." The trainer understood. It meant that he was to send The Dutchman to the post half fit, eased up in his work; then the horse could try, and the jockey could try, and, in spite of it all, the fast filly of Porter's would win, and his subtle master, Crane, would have turned the result to his own benefit. Why should he reason, or object, or counterplot, or do anything but just follow blindly the dictates of this past master in the oblique game he loved so well? Crane wanted The Dutchman because he was a good horse; he also wanted to have a heavy plunge on Lucretia; but with the son of Hanover in other hands the good thing might not come off.

Somehow Langdon felt miserably inefficient in the presence of Crane—his self-respect suffered; the other man's mind was so overmastering, even to detail. The Trainer felt a sudden desire to right himself in Crane's

estimation, give some evidence of ordinary intelligence, or capability to carry out his mission.

"If The Dutchman's owner was made to think that the horse was likely to break down, throw a splint, or—"

But Crane interrupted him in his quiet, masterful way, saying: "I know nothing of horse trading; I simply furnish the money, loan it to you, my dear Mr. Langdon, and you buy the animal in your own best way. You will pay for him with a check on my bank."

No man could close out an interview so effectually as Crane.

As Langdon slipped away as though he had been thrust bodily from the room, there was in his mind nothing but admiration of his master—the man who backed up his delicate diplomacy with liberal capital.

In spite of what he had said to Langdon, there was little doubt in Crane's mind but that the son of Hanover was a better horse than Lucretia. A sanguine owner—even Porter was one at times—was so apt to overrate everything in his own stable, especially if he had bred the animal himself, as Porter had Lucretia. To buy The Dutchman and back him on such short ownership to beat Lucretia would have been the policy of a very ordinary mind indeed; he would simply be fencing, with rapiers of equal length, with John Porter.

Crane had attained to his success by thinking a little deeper than other men, going a little beyond them in the carefulness of his plans. He knew intuitively—in fact Porter's unguarded conversation had suggested it—that Lucretia's owner meant to win himself out of his difficult position by backing the little mare heavily for the Eclipse, expecting to get his money on at good odds. By owning The Dutchman Crane could whipsaw the

situation; forestall Porter in the betting by backing Lucretia down to a short price himself, and have Jakey Faust lay with a full vigor against the Hanover colt. He would thus confine Porter to stake money, and Ringwood would still lie chained to his bank by the golden links he had forged on the place.

Almost insensibly, side by side with this weed of villainy there was growing in Crane's mind a most peculiar flower of sentiment, a love blossom. Strive as he would—though the apathy of his rebellion somewhat startled him—Crane could not obliterate from his thoughts the wondrous gray eyes of Allis Porter. Even after Langdon was gone, the atmosphere of the room still smirched by unholy underplay, thoughts of the girl came to Crane, jostling and elbowing the evil conceptions of his restless mind. Grotesquely incongruous as it was, Crane was actually in love; but the love flower, pure enough in itself, had rooted in marvelous ground. His passion was absolutely love, nothing else—love at first sight. But he was forty, and the methods of that many years must still govern his actions. Instinctively he felt that he must win the girl by diplomacy; and Crane's idea of diplomacy was to get a man irrevocably in his power. If John Porter were indebted to him beyond redemption, if he practically owned Ringwood, why should he not succeed with Allis? All his life he had gone on in just that way, breaking men, for broken men were beyond doubt but potter's clay.

Langdon bought The Dutchman. What methods he employed Crane took no pains to discover; in fact, stopped Langdon abruptly when he sought to enlarge on the difficulties he had overcome in the purchase. The price was the only item that interested Crane—seven

thousand dollars; that included everything—even the secret service money.

The horse acquired, Crane had one more move to make; he sent for Jakey Faust, the Bookmaker. Faust and Crane had a reciprocal understanding. When the Bookmaker needed financial assistance he got it from the Banker; when Crane needed a missionary among the other bookmakers, Faust acted for him.

"I want to back Lucretia for the 'Eclipse,'" Crane said to the bookmaker.

"Lucretia," ejaculated Faust. "She'll have a rosy time beatin' Dutchy on their last race. They'll put a better boy up on the colt next time, an' he ought to come home all by himself."

"Yes, a fairish sort of a jock will have the mount I think—Westley's a good enough boy."

"Westley?" came wonderingly from Faust.

"Yes; Langdon owns The Dutchman now."

The Cherub pursed his fat round lips in a soft whistle of enlightenment. It had staggered him at first that Crane, for whose acumen he had a profound respect, should have intended such a hazardous gamble; now he saw light.

"Then my book is full on the Porter mare?" he said, inquiringly.

Crane nodded his head.

"An' I lay against the Hanover colt?"

Again Crane nodded.

"It's not bookmaking," continued Faust.

"I'm not a bookmaker," retorted Crane. "And see here, Faust," he continued, "when you've got my money on the Porter mare—when and how I leave to you—I want you to cut her price short—do you understand?

Make her go to the post two to one on, if you can; don't forget that."

"If the mare goes wrong?" objected Faust.

"I don't think she will, but you needn't be in a hurry —there's plenty of time."

"What's the limit?" asked Faust.

"I want her backed down to even money at least," Crane answered; "probably ten thousand will do it. At any rate you can go that far."

Then for a few days Langdon prepared his new horse for the Eclipse according to his idea of Crane's idea; and Dixon rounded Lucretia to in a manner that gladdened John Porter's heart. They knew nothing of anything but that Lucretia was very fit, that they had Boston Bill's jockey to ride straight and honest for them, and that with a good price against the mare they would recoup all their losses.

VI

THE day of the race when John Porter went into the betting ring he was confronted with even money about his mare. If he had read on the ring blackboard a notice that she was dead, he would not have been more astonished. He fought his way back to the open of the paddock without making a bet.

"Even money!" ejaculated Dixon when his owner told him of the ring situation, "why, they're crazy. Who's doin' it?"

"Not the public," declared Porter, "for I was there just after the first betting. It must be your friend Boston Bill that has forestalled us; nobody else knew of the mare's trial."

"Not on your life, Mr. Porter; Boston plays fair. D'ye think he could live at this game if he threw down his friends?"

"But nobody else even knew that we'd got a good boy for the mare."

"It don't make no difference," curtly answered Dixon; "it's a million dollars to a penny whistle that Boston hasn't a dollar on yet. Our agreement was that he'd send in his commission when they were at the post, an' his word's like your own, sir, as solid as a judge's decision. It's some one else. There's somebody behind that damned Langdon—he's not clever enough for all this. D'you know that The Dutchman's runnin' in Langdon's name to-day?"

"He is?"

"Yes; he's supposed to own him."

"But what's that got to do with Lucretia's price?"

"It means that we're goin' to be allowed to win. The other day they laid against her, an' she got beat; to-day they're holdin' her out, so I suppose she'll win, but somebody else gets the benefit."

"Gad! that Langdon must be a crook," muttered Porter. "I'm going to speak to my friend Crane about him again. No honest man should have horses in his stable."

"That they shouldn't," asserted Dixon. "But we've got our own troubles to-day. From what I see of this thing, I'd rather back the mare at even money than I would if she was ten to one. If I'm any judge we're being buncoed good and plenty."

"I think you're right Dixon. I'll go back and have a good bet down on her at evens."

But in five minutes Lucretia's owner was back in the paddock with the cheerful intelligence that the mare was now three to five.

"I wouldn't back 'Salvator' among a lot of cart horses at that price," commented Dixon; "leave it alone, an' we'll go for the Stake. We're up against it good and hard; somebody seems to know more about our own horse than we do ourselves."

"I think myself that the gods are angry with us, Dixon," said Porter moodily; and the mortals will be furious, too, whichever way the race goes. They've backed the little mare at this short price no doubt, an' if she's beaten they'll howl; if she wins they'll swear my money was on to-day, and that I pulled her in her last race."

John Porter sat in the Grand Stand with his usual

companion, Allis, beside him, as The Dutchman, Lucretia, and the other Eclipse horses passed down the broad spread of the straight Eclipse course to the five-and-a-half furlong post.

Though Porter had missed his betting, he intuitively felt the joy of an anticipated win. Only a true lover of thoroughbreds can know anything of the mad tumult of exultation that vibrates the heart strings as a loved horse comes bravely, gallantly out from the surging throng of his rivals, peerless and king of them all, stretching his tapered neck with eager striving, and goes onward, past the tribunal, first and alone, the leader, the winner, the one to be cheered of the many thousands wrought to frenzy by his conquest.

"Surely Lucretia will win to-day, father—don't you think so?" asked Allis; "I feel that she will."

"She's got a big weight up," he answered. "She's a little bit of a thing, and it may drive her into the ground coming down the Eclipse hill. I expect they'll come at a terrible jog, too; they don't often hang back on that course."

Now that the betting worry and the labor of getting an honest boy were over—that the horses had gone to the post, and that the race rested with Lucretia herself, Porter's mind had relaxed. Even at the time of the very struggle itself tension had gone from him; he was in a meditative mood, and spoke on, weighing the chances, with Allis as audience.

"But they'll have to move some to beat the little mare's trial—they'll make it in record time if they head her, I think."

"Isn't the horse that beat her the other day in, too, father?"

"The Dutchman—yes, but I fancy his owner is backing my mare."

"Father!"

"It wouldn't make any difference, though; she'd beat him anyway. If I'm any judge, he's short."

Allis felt a rustle at her elbow as though someone wished to pass between the seats. The faintest whiff of stephanotis came to her on the lazy summer air. Involuntarily she turned her head and looked for the harsh-voiced woman who had been verily steeped in the aggressive odor the day of Lauzanne's triumph. Two burly men sat behind her. They, surely, did not affect perfumery. Higher up the stand her eye searched—four rows back sat the woman Alan had said was Langdon's sister. There was no forgetting the flamboyant brilliancy of her apparel. But the almost fancied zephyr of stephanotis was mingling with the rustle at her elbow; she turned her head inquiringly in that direction, and Crane's eyes peeped at her over the stone wall of their narrow lids. He was standing in the passage just beyond her father, now looking wistfully at the vacant seat on her left.

"Good afternoon, Miss Porter—how are you, Porter? May I sit here with you and see Lucretia win?"

"Come in, come in!" answered Porter, frankly.

"I was sitting with some friends higher up in the stand, when I saw you here, and thought I'd like to make one of the victorious party."

Allis knew who the friends were; the clinging touch of stephanotis had come with him. The discrepancy in Crane's sentiments jarred on Allis. That other day this woman had been his trainer's sister, recognized for politic purposes; to-day he had been sitting with "friends."

CHAPTER SIX

Topping the rail in the distance, just where the course kinked a little to the left, Allis could see the blur of many colored silks in the sunlight. Then it seemed to flatten down almost level with the rail, as the horses broadened out to the earth in racing spread and the riders clung low to the galloping colts, for they had started.

"There they come," said Crane. "What's in the lead, Porter?"

Porter did not answer. A man could have counted thirty before he said, "The Dutchman's out in front—a length, and they're coming down the hill like mad."

Allis felt her heart sink. Was it to be the same old story—was there always to be something in front of Lucretia?

"Where is your mare?" Crane asked.

His own glass lay idly in his lap. Though he spoke of the race, it was curious that his eyes were watching the play of Allis's features, as Hope and Despair fought their old human-torturing fight over again in her heart.

"Now she's coming!" Porter's voice made Crane jump; he had almost forgotten the race. To the close-calculating mind it had been settled days before. The Dutchman would not win, and Lucretia was the best of the others—why worry?

They were standing now—everybody was.

"Now, my beauty, they'll have to gallop," Porter was saying.

They were close up, and Crane could see that Lucretia had got to the bay colt's head, and he was dying away. He smiled cynically as he watched Westley go to the whip on The Dutchman, with Lucretia half a length in the lead. Most certainly Langdon was an excellent

trainer; The Dutchman was just good enough to last into second place, and Lucretia had won handily. What a win Crane had had!

A little smothered gasp distracted his momentary thought of success, and, turning quickly, he saw tears in a pair of gray eyes that were set in a smiling face.

"Like a babe on his neck I was sobbing," came back to Crane out of the poem Allis had recited.

"I congratulate you, Miss Porter," he said, raising his hat. Then he turned, and held out his hand to her father, saying: "I'm glad you've won, Porter—I thought you would. The Dutchman quit when he was pinched."

"It wasn't the colt's fault—he was short," said Porter. "I shouldn't like to have horses in that man's stable—he's too good a trainer for me."

There was a marked emphasis on Porter's words; he was trying to give Crane a friendly hint.

"You mean it's a case of strawberries?" questioned Crane.

"Well I know it takes a lot of candles to find a lost quarter," remarked Porter, somewhat ambiguously. Then he added, "I must go down to thank Dixon; I guess this is his annual day for smiling."

"I'm coming, too, father," said Allis; "I want to thank *Lucretia,* and give her a kiss, brave little sweetheart."

After Allis and her father had left Crane, he sat for a minute or two waiting for the crowd of people that blocked the passageway after each race to filter down on the lawn. The way seemed clearer presently, and Crane fell in behind a knot of loud-talking men. The two of large proportions who had sat behind Allis, were like huge gate posts jammed there in the narrow way. As he

moved along slowly he presently had knowledge of a presence at his side—a familiar presence. Raising his eyes from a contemplation of the heels in front of him, he saw Belle Langdon. She nodded with patronizing freedom.

"I lost you," she said.

"I was sitting with some friends here," he explained.

"Yes, I saw her," she commented pointedly.

At that instant one of the stout men in front said, with a bear's snarl, "Well that's the worst ever; I've seen some jobs in my time, but this puts it over anything yet."

"Didn't you back the little mare?" a thin voice squealed. It was the Tout.

"Back nothin'! The last time out she couldn't untrack herself; an' to-day she comes, without any pull in the weight, and wins in a walk from The Dutchman; and didn't he beat her just as easy the other day?"

Belle Langdon looked into Crane's face, and her eyes were charged with a look of reciprocal meaning. Crane winched. How aggressively obnoxious this half-tutored girl, mistress of many gay frocks, could make herself! There was an implied crime-partnership in her glance which revolted him. Dick Langdon must have talked in his own home. Crane's conscience—well, he hardly had one perhaps, at least it was always subevident; to put it in another way, the retrospect of his manipulated diplomacy never bothered him; but this gratuitous sharing in his evil triumph was disquieting. The malicious glitter of the girl's small black eyes contrasted strongly with the honest, unaffected look that was forever in the big tranquil eyes of Allis.

They were just at the head of the steps, and the Tout

was saying to the fat expostulator: "I could have put you next; I steered a big bettor on—he won a thousand over the mare. I saw Boston's betting man havin' an old-time play, an' I knew it was a lead-pipe cinch. He's a sure thing bettor, he is; odds don't make no difference to him, the shorter the better—that's when his own boy's got the mount."

"It's all right to be wise after the race," grunted the fat man.

"G'wan! the stable didn't have a penny on Lucretia last time; an' what do you suppose made her favorite to-day?" queried the Tout, derisively. "It took a bar'l of money," he continued, full of his own logical deductions, "an' I'll bet Porter cleaned up twenty thousand. He's a pretty slick cove, is old 'Honest John,' if you ask me."

The girl at Crane's side cackled a laugh. "He's funny, isn't he?" she said, nodding her big plumed hat in the direction of the man-group.

"He's a talkative fool!" muttered the Banker, shortly. "The steps are clear on the other side, Miss Langdon, you can get down there. I've got to go into the paddock; you'll excuse me."

Being vicious for the fun of the thing had never appealed to Crane; he raced as he did everything else—to win. If other men suffered, that was the play of fate. He never talked about these things himself, almost disliked to think of them. He turned his back on Belle Langdon and went down the right-hand steps. On the grass sward at the bottom he stopped for an instant to look across at the jockey board.

Three men had just came out of the refreshment bar under the stand. They were possessed of many things;

gold of the bookmakers in their pockets, and it's ever-attendant exhilaration in their hearts. One of them had cracked a bottle of wine at the bar, as tribute to the exceeding swiftness of Lucretia, for he had won plentifully. At that particular stage there was nothing left but to talk it over, and they talked. Crane, avaricious, unhesitating in his fighting, devoid of sympathy, was not of the eavesdropping class, but as he stood there he was as much a part of the other men's conversation as though he had been a fourth member of the brotherhood.

"I tell you none of these trainers ain't in it with a gentleman owner—when he takes to racin'. When a man of brains takes to runnin' horses as a profesh, he's gen'rally a Jim Dandy." It was he of the wine-opening who let fall these words of wise value.

"D'you mean Porter, Jim?" asked number two of the trio.

"Maybe that's his name. An' he put it all over Mister Langdon this trip."

"As how?" queried the other.

"Last time he runs his mare she's got corns in her feet the whole journey, an' all the time he owns the winner, Lauzanne, see?—buys him before they go out. Then Langdon thinks The Dutchman's the goods, an' buys him at a fancy price—gives a bale of long goods for him —I've got it straight that he parted with fifteen thousand. Then the gentleman owner, Honest John, turns the trick with Lucretia, an' makes The Dutchman look like a sellin' plater."

"I guess Langdon'll feel pretty sick," hazarded number three.

"I'd been watchin' the game," continued the wine-

man, "an' soon's I saw a move to-day from the wise guys in the ring, I plumped for the mare 'toot sweet.'"

What an extraordinary thing manipulation was, Crane mused, as he listened; also how considerable of an ass the public was in its theoretical wisdom.

Then the three men drifted away to follow some new toy balloon of erratic possibilities, and Crane wound through the narrow passage which led to the paddock. There he encountered Langdon.

"He didn't run a very good horse, sir," began the Trainer.

"I thought otherwise," replied Crane, measuring the immediate vicinity of listeners.

"I had to draw it a bit fine," declared Langdon, with apologetic remonstrance.

"Running second is always bad business, except in a selling race," retorted his master.

"I've got to think of myself," growled Langdon. "If he'd been beat off, there'd been trouble; the Stewards have got the other race in their crop a bit yet."

"I'm not blaming you, Langdon, only I was just a trifle afraid that you were going to beat Porter's mare. He's a friend of mine, and needed a win badly. I'm not exactly his father confessor, but I'm his banker, which amounts to pretty much the same thing."

"What about the horse, sir," asked the Trainer.

"We'll see later on. Let him go easy for the present."

"I wonder what he meant by that," Langdon mused to himself, as Crane moved away. "He don't make nobody a present of a race for love." Suddenly he stumbled upon a solution of the enigma. "Well, I'm damned if that wasn't slick; he give me the straight tip to leave Porter to him—to let him do the plannin'; I see."

VII

PORTER was an easy man with his horses. Though he could not afford, because of his needs, to work out his theory that two-year-olds should not be raced, yet he utilized it as far as possible by running them at longer intervals than was general.

"I'll start the little mare about once more this season," he told Dixon. "The babes can't cut teeth, and grow, and fight it out in punishing races on dusty hay and hard-shelled oats, when they ought to be picking grass in an open field. She's too good a beast to do up in her young days. The Assassins made good three-year-olds, and the little mare's dam, Maid of Rome, wasn't much her first year out—only won once—but as a three-year-old she won three out of four starts, and the fourth year never lost a race. Lucretia ought to be a great mare next year if I lay her by early this season. She's in a couple of stakes at Gravesend and Sheepshead, and we'll just fit her into the softest spot."

"What about Lauzanne?" asked the Trainer, "I'm afraid he's a bad horse."

"How is he doing?"

"He's stale. He's a bad doer—doesn't clean up his oats, an' mopes."

"I guess that killing finish with The Dutchman took the life out of him. That sort of thing often settles a soft-hearted horse for all time."

"I don't think it was the race, sir," Dixon replied;

"they just pumped the cocaine into him till he was fair blind drunk; he must a' swallowed the bottle. I give him a ball, a bran mash, and Lord knows what all, an' the poison's workin' out of him. He's all breakin' out in lumps; you'd think he'd been stung by bees."

"I never heard of such a thing," commented Porter. "A man that would dope a two-year-old ought to be ruled off, sure."

"I think you oughter make a kick, sir," said Dixon, hesitatingly.

"I don't. When I squeal, Andy, it'll be when there's nothing but the voice left. I bought a horse from a man once *just as he stood.* I happened to know the horse, and said I didn't want any inspection—didn't want to see him, but bought him, as I say, *just as he stood.* When I went to the stable to get him he wasn't worth much, Andy—he was dead. Perhaps I might have made a kick about his not standing up, but I didn't."

"Well, sir, I'm thinkin' Lauzanne's a deuced sight worse'n a dead horse; he'll cost more tryin' to win with him."

"I dare say you're right, but he can gallop a bit—"

"When he's primed."

"No dope for me, Andy. I never ran a dope horse and never will—I'm too fond of them to poison them."

"I'll freshen him up a bit, sir, and we'll give him a try in a day or two. Would you mind puttin' him in a sellin' race?—he cost a bit."

"He couldn't win anything else, and if anybody wants to claim him they can."

"I thought of starting Diablo in that mile handicap; he's in pretty light. He's about all we've got ready."

"All right, Dixon," Porter replied. "It may be that we've broke our bad luck with the little mare."

They were standing in the paddock during this conversation. It was in the forenoon; Dixon had come over to the Secretary's office to see about some entries before twelve o'clock. When the Trainer had finished his business, the two men walked across the course and in-field to Stable 12, where Dixon had his horses. As they passed over the "Withers Course," as the circular track was called, Dixon pointed to the dip near the lower far turn.

"It's a deuced funny thing," he said, speaking reminiscently, "but that little hollow there settles more horses than the last fifty yards of the finish; it seems to make the soft ones remember that they're runnin' when they get that change, an' they stop. I bet Diablo'll quit right there, he's done it three or four times."

"He was the making of a great horse as a two-year-old, wasn't he, Andy?"

"They paid a long price for him, if that's any line; but I think he never was no good. It don't matter how fast a horse is if he won't try."

"I've an idea Diablo'll be a good horse yet," mused Porter. "You can't make a slow horse gallop, but there's a chance of curing a horse's temper by kind treatment. I've noticed that a squealing pig generally runs like the devil when he takes it into his head."

"Diablo's a squealing pig if there ever was one," growled Dixon.

They reached the track stable, and, as if by a mutual instinct, the two men walked on till they stood in front of Lauzanne's stall.

"He's a good enough looker, ain't he?" commented

Dixon, as he dipped under the door bar, went into the stall, and turned the horse about. "He's the picture of his old sire, Lazzarone," he continued, looking the horse over critically; "an' a damned sight bigger rogue, though the old one was bad enough. Lazzarone won the Suburban with blinkers on his head, bandages on his legs, an' God knows what in his stomach. He was second in the Brooklyn that same year. I've always heard he was a mule, an' I guess this one got it all, an' none of the gallopin'."

"How does he work with the others?" queried Porter.

"Runs a bit, an' then cuts it—won't try a yard. Of course he's sick from the dope, an' the others are a bit fast for him. If we put him in a sellin' race, cheap, he'd have a light weight, an' might do better."

Porter walked on to Lucretia's stall, and the trainer continued in a monologue to Lauzanne: "You big slob! you're a counterfeit, if there ever was one. But I'll stand you a drink just to get rid of you; I'll put a bottle of whisky inside of your vest day after to-morrow, an' if you win p'raps somebody'll buy you."

Lauzanne did not answer—it's a way horses have. It is doubtful if his mind quite grasped the situation, even. That neither Dixon, nor Langdon, nor the jockey boys understood him he knew—not clearly, but approximately enough to increase his stubbornness, to rouse his resentment. They had not even studied out the pathology of his descent sufficiently well to give him a fair show, to train him intelligently. They remembered that his sire, Lazzarone, had a bad temper; but they forgot that he was a stayer, not given to sprinting. Even Lauzanne's dam, Bric-a-brac, was fond of a long route, was better at a mile-and-a-half than five furlongs.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Lauzanne knew what had come to him of genealogy, not in his mind so much as in his muscles. They were strong but sluggish, not active but non-tiring. Langdon had raced Lauzanne with sprinting colts, and when they ran away from him at the start he had been unequal to the task of overhauling them in the short two-year-old run of half-a-mile. Then the wise man had said that Lauzanne's courage was at fault; the jockeys had called it laziness, and applied the whip. And out of all this uselessness, this unthinking philosophy, the colt had come with a soured temper, a broken belief in his masters—"Lauzanne the Despised."

Porter's trust that his ill luck had been changed by a win was a faith of short life, for Diablo was most emphatically beaten in his race.

And then came the day of forlorn hope, the day of Lauzanne's disgrace, inasmuch as it de-graduated him into the selling-platter class.

Bad horse as Langdon knew Lauzanne to be, it occurred to him that Porter had planned a clever *coup*. He had an interview with Crane over the subject, but his master did not at all share the Trainer's belief.

"What price would Lucretia, or The Dutchman, be in with the same lot?" Langdon asked, argumentatively.

"About one to ten," Crane replied. "But the Chestnut's beating them had no bearing on this race. From what I see of Mr. Dixon, I don't at all class him with you as a trainer—he hasn't the same resource."

Langdon stood silent, sullenly turning over in his mind this doubtful compliment.

"I'm not sure," continued the Banker, "but that having stuck Porter with Lauzanne, you shouldn't give him

a hint about—well, as to what course of preparation would make Lauzanne win a race for him. The ordinary diet of oats is hardly stimulating enough for such a sluggish animal."

Langdon frowned. If Crane had not been quite so strong, quite so full of unexpressed power, he would have rebelled at the assertion that *he* had stuck Porter; but he answered, and his voice struggled between asperity and deprecation, "There ain't no call for me to give that stable any pointers; Porter put it to me pretty straight that the horse had been helped."

"And what did you say?" blandly inquired Crane.

"Told him to go to hell."

This wasn't exactly truthful as we remember the interview, but its terseness appealed to Crane, and he smiled as he said: "Porter probably won't take your advice, Langdon; he's stubborn enough at times. And even if he does know that—that—Lauzanne requires special treatment, he won't indulge him—he's got a lot of old-fashioned ideas about racing. So you see Lauzanne is a bad betting proposition."

After Langdon had left Crane's thoughts dwelt on the subject they had just discussed.

"From a backer's point of view Lauzanne is certainly bad business," he mused; "but the public will reason just as Langdon does. And what's bad for the backers is good for the layers; I must see Faust."

"You had better make a book to beat Lauzanne," Crane said to Jakey Faust, just before business had commenced in the ring that afternoon.

The Cherub stared in astonishment; his eyes opened wide. That was nearly the limit of his fat little face's expression, no matter what the occasion.

"You don't own him now, do you, sir?" he blurted out, with unthinking candor.

"I do not."

"He's dropped into a soft spot—he rates best in the percentage card."

"Figures sometimes lie," commented Crane.

"Every handicapper tips him to win."

"They're all broke because of their knowledge."

"The books'll mark him up first choice."

"That's why it will be worth while playing the field to beat him."

"He's in with a gang of muts to-day, an' he beat some cracker-jacks last time out."

"You were hypnotized that day, Mr. Faust; so was the Judge. *Lauzanne* didn't beat anything."

"Didn't beat—what the hell—didn't the Chestnut get the verdict?"

"He did; but—" and Crane looked at Faust, with patient toleration of his lack of perception.

The Cherub waited for an explanation of these contradictory remarks. But he might have waited indefinitely—Crane had quite finished. The Cherub raised his little round eyes, that were like glass alleys, green and red and blue-streaked, to the other's face inquiringly, and encountered a pair of penetrating orbs peering at him over some sort of a mask—the face that sustained the eyes was certainly a mask—as expressionless. Then it came to Jakey Faust that there was nothing left to do but fill the Lauzanne column in his book with the many bets that would come his way and make much money.

Crane watched Lauzanne go lazily, sluggishly down to the post for his race. He knew the horse's moods;

the walk of the Chestnut was the indifferent stroll of a horse that is thinking only of his dinner.

"They've given him nothing," the Banker muttered to himself; "the heavy-headed brute won't try a yard. But he'll fight the boy when he tries to ride him out."

The whisky that Dixon had surreptitiously given Lauzanne had been as inefficacious as so much ginger beer; and in the race Lauzanne drew back out of the bustle and clash of the striving horses as quickly as he could. In vain his jockey used whip and spur; Lauzanne simply put his ears back, switched his tail, and loafed along, a dozen lengths behind his field.

In the straight he made up a little of the lost ground, but he was securely out of the money at the finish. Fate still sat and threw the dice as he had for many moons—a deuce for John Porter, and a six for Philip Crane.

VIII

It was late autumn; the legitimate racing season had closed. In August Porter had taken his horses back to Ringwood for the winter.

When a man strives against Fate, when realization laughs mockingly at his expectations, there comes to him a time when he longs for a breathing spell, when he knows that he must rest, and wait until the wheel of life, slow-turning, has passed a little through the groove of his existence. John Porter had been beaten down at every point. Disastrous years come to all men, whether they race horses or point the truthful way, and this year had been but a series of disappointments to the master of Ringwood.

After Lucretia's win in the Eclipse, Porter did not land another race. Lucretia caught cold and went off. He tried Lauzanne twice again, but the Chestnut seemed thoroughly soured. Now he was back at Ringwood, a dark cloud of indebtedness hanging over the beautiful place, and prospect of relief very shadowy. If Lucretia wintered well and grew big and strong she might extricate him from his difficulties by winning one or two of the big races the following summer. About any of the other horses there was not even this much of promise.

Thoroughly distrusting Lauzanne, embittered by his cowardice, Porter had given him away—but to Allis. Strangely enough, the girl had taken a strong liking to

the son of Lazzarone; it may have been because of the feeling that she was indirectly responsible for his presence at Ringwood. Allis Porter's perceptions had been developed to an extraordinary degree. All her life she had lived surrounded by thoroughbreds, and her sensitive nature went out to them, in their courage and loyalty, in a manner quite beyond possibility in a practical, routine-following horseman. To her they were almost human; the play of their minds was as attractive and interesting as the development of their muscles was to a trainer. When the stable had been taken back to Ringwood, she had asked for Lauzanne as a riding horse.

"I'm going to give him away," her father had replied; "I can't sell him—nobody would buy a brute with such a reputation." This word brought to Porter's mind his chief cause of resentment against the Chestnut. The public having got into its head that Porter was playing *coups,* generously suggested that he was pulling Lauzanne to get him in some big handicap light.

"I won't feed such a skate all winter," he declared angrily, after a little pause.

"Well, give him to me, father," the girl had pleaded; "I am certain that he'll make good some day; you'll see that he'll pay you for keeping your word."

As Allis rode Lauzanne she discovered many things about the horse; that instead of being a stupid, morose brute, his intelligence was extraordinary, and, with her at least, his temper perfect.

Allis's relationship with her father was unusual. They were chums; in all his trouble, in all his moments of wavering, buffeted by the waves of disaster, Allis was the one who cheered him, who regirt him in his armor

—Allis, the slight olive-faced little woman, with the big, fearless Joan-of-Arc eyes.

"You'll see what we'll do next summer, Dad," she said cheerily. "You'll win with Lucretia as often as you did with her mother; and I'll win with Lauzanne. We'll just keep quiet till spring, then we'll show them."

Langdon's horses, so silently controlled by Philip Crane, Banker, had been put in winter quarters at Gravesend, where Langdon had a cottage. Crane's racing season had been as successful as the Master of Ringwood's had been disastrous. He had won a fair-class race with The Dutchman—ostensibly Langdon's horse—and then, holding true to his nature, which was to hasten slowly, threw him out of training and deliberately planned a big *coup* for the next year. The colt was engaged in several three-year-old stakes, and Crane set Langdon to work to find out his capabilities. As his owner expected, he showed them in a severe trial gallop the true Hanover staying-power.

Although Crane had said nothing about it at the time, he had his eye on the Eastern Derby when he commissioned Langdon to purchase this gallant son of Hanover. It was a long way ahead to look, to lay plans to win a race the following June, but that was the essence of Crane's existence, careful planning. He loved it. He was a master at it. And, after all, given a good stayer, such as he had in The Dutchman, the mile-and-a-half run of the Derby left less to chance than any other stake he could have pitched upon; the result would depend absolutely upon the class and stamina of the horses. No bad start could upset his calculations, no little interference in the race could destroy his horse's chance if he were good enough to win. The Dutchman's races as

a two-year-old would not warrant his being made a favorite, and Langdon, properly directed, was clever enough to see that The Dutchman was at a comfortable price for betting purposes.

Many things had crowded into this year of Crane's life. The bank, doing but a modest business always, was running so smoothly that it required little attention from the owner. This was one reason why he had thrown so much subtle energy into his racing; its speculation appealed to him. The plucking he had received as a moneyed youth rankled in his heart. The possession of such a faithful jackal as Langdon carried him to greater lengths than he would have gone had the obnoxious details been subject to his own execution. Though conscienceless, he was more or less fastidious. Had a horse broken down and become utterly useless, he would have ordered him to be destroyed without experiencing any feeling of compassion—he would have dismissed the matter entirely from his mind with the passing of the command; but rather than destroy the horse himself, he probably would have fed him. And so it was with men. If they were driven to the wall because of his plans, that was there own look out; it did not trouble Philip Crane.

Porter he had known simply in a business way. From the first he had felt that Ringwood would pass out of its owner's possession, and he had begun to covet it. The Lauzanne race had been Langdon's planning altogether. Crane, cold-blooded as he was, would not have robbed a man he had business dealings with deliberately. He had told his trainer to win, if possible, a race with Lauzanne, and get rid of him. That Langdon's villainous scheme had borne evil fruit for John Porter was purely a matter of chance selection. There was a Mephis-

tophelean restitution in not striving to wrest the Eclipse from Lucretia with The Dutchman.

And now, in this year, had come the entirely new experience of an affection—his admiration for Allis Porter. It conflicted with every other emotion that governed his being. All his life he had been selfish—considering only Philip Crane, his mind unharrassed by anything but business obstacles in his ambitious career. Love for this quiet, self-contained girl, unadorned by anything but the truth, and honesty, and fearlessness that were in her big steadfast eyes, had come upon him suddenly and with an assertive force that completely mastered him. By a mere chance he had heard Allis give her recitation, "The Run of Crusader," in the little church at Brookfield. Crane was not an agnostic, but he had interested himself little in church matters; and the Reverend Dolman's concert, that was meant to top down many weeds of debt that were choking the church, had claimed him simply because an evening in Brookfield had come to hang heavily on his hands.

Now when the Reverend Dolman received Philip Crane's check for fifty dollars the next day, to be applied to the church encumbrance, he sought to allay his surprise by attributing the gift to his own special pleading that evening, of course backed up by Providence. If anybody had stated that the mainspring of the gift had been the wicked horse-racing poem of their denunciation he would have been scandalized and full of righteous disbelief. It is quite likely that even Crane would have denied that Allis's poem had inspired him to the check; but nevertheless it had.

The world of feeling and sympathy and goodness that had hung in her voice had set a new window in his soul

slightly ajar—so slightly ajar that even now, months afterward, the lovelight was only beginning to stream through. When love comes to a man at forty he is apt to play the game very badly indeed; he turns it into a very anxious business, and moves through the light-tripping measure with the pedantic dignity of a minuet dancer. But Philip Crane was not given to making mistakes; he knew that, like Crusader, "His best racing days (in the love stakes) were over"—especially where the woman was but a girl. So he sat down and planned it all out as he planned to win the Brooklyn Derby months later. And all the time he was as sincerely in love as if he had blundered into many foolishnesses; but his love making was to be diplomatic. Even now all the gods of Fate stood ranged on his side; Allis's brother was in his bank, more or less dependent upon him; Ringwood itself was all but in the bank; he stood fairly well with John Porter, and much better with Allis's mother, for already he had begun to ingratitate himself with Mrs. Porter. He would cast from the shoulders of the Reverend Dolman a trifle more of the load he was carrying. He would send the reverend gentleman another check.

Why he should think it necessary to prepare his suit with so much subtlety he hardly knew; in all reason he should be considered a fair match for Allis Porter. He was not a bad man as the world understood him; he did not profess Christianity, but, on the other hand, his life was extremely respectable; he did not drink; he was not given to profane language; even in racing his presence seemed to lend an air of respectability to the sport, and it was generally supposed that he raced purely for relaxation. In truth, it seemed to him that his

marriage with Allis would be a deuced good thing for the Porters.

In actuality there were just two things that stood in the way—two things which his position and wealth could not obviate—his age, and the Porter pride. If Porter had not been dubbed "Honest John" early in life, he might have been saddled with "Proud Porter" later on. The pride had come up out of old Kentucky with all the other useless things—the horse-racing, and the inability to make money, and the fancy for keeping a promise. Something whispered to Crane that Allis would never come to him simply out of love; it might be regard, esteem, a desire to please her parents, a bowing to the evident decree of fate. Perhaps even the very difficulty of conquest made Crane the more determined to win, and made him hasten slowly.

IX

As a rule few visitors went to Ringwood.

John Porter had been too interested in his horses and his home life to care much for social matters. Mrs. Porter was a home-body, too, caring nothing at all for society—at best there was but little of it in Brookfield—except where it was connected with church work. Perhaps that was one reason why Allis had grown so close into her father's life. It was a very small, self-contained household.

Mike Gaynor had become attached to the staff at Ringwood this winter as a sort of assistant trainer to Porter. Dixon only trained the Ringwood horses during the racing season, Porter always supervising them in winter quarters. Perhaps it was Porter's great cloud of evil fortune which had cast its sinister influence over Mike because of his sympathy for the master of Ringwood; certain it is that the autumn found him quite "on his uppers," as he graphically described his financial standing. An arrangement was made by which Mike's disconsolate horses were fed at Ringwood, and he took care of both strings. This delighted Allis, for she had full confidence in Gaynor's integrity and good sense.

The early winter brought two visitors to Ringwood—Crane, who came quite often, and Mortimer, who went out to the farm a couple of times with Alan.

George Mortimer might be described as an angular young man. His face, large-featured, square-jawed, and

bold-topped by broad forehead, suggested the solemnity Alan had found so trying. Of course a young man of his make-up was sure to have notions, and Mortimer's mind was knotted with them; there seemed no soft nor smooth places in his timber. That was why he had reasoned with the butcher by energetically grasping his windpipe the evening that worthy gentleman had expressed himself so distastefully over Allis Porter's contribution to the Reverend Dolman's concert. Perhaps a young man of more subtle grace would have received some grateful recognition for this office, but the matter had been quite closed out so far as Mortimer was concerned; Alan tried to refer to it afterward, but had been curtly stopped.

George Mortimer's chief notion was that work was a great thing, seemingly the chief end of man. Another notion almost equally prominent—he had derived it from his mother—was, that all forms of gambling were extremely bad business. First and foremost in this interdiction stood horse racing. The touch of it that hung like a small cloud over the Brookfield horizon had inspired Mrs. Mortimer, as it had other good people of the surrounding country, with the restricted idea that those who had to do with thoroughbred horses were simply gamblers—betting people. Her home was in Emerson, a dozen miles from Brookfield.

Quite paradoxically, if Allis Porter had not given "The Run of Crusader"—most certainly a racing poem—in the little church, this angular young man with stringent ideas about running horses probably would have never visited Ringwood. Something of the wide sympathy that emanated from her as she told of the gallant horse's death struck into his strong nature, and there commenced to creep into his thoughts at odd in-

tervals a sort of gratuitous pity that she should be inextricably mixed up with race horses. His original honesty of thought and the narrowness of his tuition were apt to make him egotistically sure that the things which appealed to him as being right were incapable of variation.

At first he had liked Alan Porter, with no tremendous amount of unbending; now, because of the interest Allis had excited in him, the liking began to take on a supervisory form, and it was not without a touch of irritation in his voice that Alan informed his sister that he had acquired a second father, and with juvenile malignity attributed the incumbrance to her seductive influence.

With all these cross purposes at work it can be readily understood that Mortimer's visits to Ringwood were not exactly rose-leaved. In truth, the actors were all too conventionally honest, too unsocialized, to subvert their underlying motives. Allis, with her fine intuition, would have unearthed Mortimer's disapprobation of racing—though he awkwardly strove to hide it—even if Alan had not enlarged upon this point. This knowledge constrained the girl, even drove her into rebellion. She took his misunderstanding as a fault, almost as a weakness, and shocked the young man with carefully prepared racing expressions; reveled with strange abandon in talks of gallops, and trials, and work-outs, and breathers; threw iron-mouthed horses, pullers, skates, and divers other equine wonders at his head until he revolted in sullen irritation. In fact they misunderstood each other finely; in truth their different natures were more in harmony two miles apart, the distance that lay between the bank and Ringwood.

CHAPTER NINE

By comparison Crane's visits to Ringwood were utopianly complacent. Strangely enough, Mrs. Porter, opposed to racing as she was, came quite readily under the glamor of his artistic unobtrusiveness. He had complete mastery over the science of waiting. His admission to the good lady of a passing interest in horses was an apology; there seemed such an utter absence of the betting spirit that the recreation it afforded him condoned the offense.

There was this difference between the two men, the old and the young: Crane knew exactly why he went there, while Mortimer had asked himself more than once, coming back from Ringwood feeling that he had been misunderstood—perhaps even laughed at—why he had gone there at all. He had no definite plan, even desire; he was impelled to it out of some unrecognized force. It was because of these conditions that the one potter turned his images so perfectly, and the other formed only poor, distorted, often broken, dishes of inferior clay.

It stood in the reason of things, however, that Mortimer, in spite of his uncompromising attitude toward racing, should be touched by its tentacles if he visited at Ringwood.

His first baptism came with much precipitancy on the occasion of his fourth visit to the Porters. He had driven out with Alan to spend his Saturday afternoon at Ringwood. An afternoon is not exactly like an evening in the matter of entertaining a guest; something must be done; cigars, or music, or small chatter are insufficient. If one is on the western slope of life's Sierra perhaps a nap may kill the time profitably enough, but this was a case where a young man had to

be entertained, a young man difficult of entertainment under the circumstances.

Alan had some barbarous expedition of juvenile interest on hand; the unearthing of a woodchuck, or it might have been a groundhog, in a back field; but Allis would not become a party to the destruction of animal life for the sport of the thing. She had a much better programme mapped out for Mortimer. Some way she felt that if he could see the thoroughbred horses in their stalls, could come to know them individually, casually though it might be, he would perhaps catch a glimmer of their beautiful characters. So she asked Mr. Mortimer to go and have a look at her pets. Alan would none of it; he was off to his woodchuck or groundhog.

"I'm glad you don't want to go and kill anything," she said, turning gratefully to Mortimer when he refused Alan's invitation, saying that he preferred to look at the horses. "I'll show you Diablo, and Lucretia, and Lauzanne the Despised—he's my horse, and I'm to win a big race with him next year. Gaynor is down at the stables; and I'll give you a tip"—Mortimer winced—"if you want to stand well in with Mike, let him suspect that you're fond of horses."

At the stable door they met Mike Gaynor. Mike usually vacillated between a condition of chronic anger at somebody or something, and an Irish drollery that made people who were sick at heart laugh. Allis was as familiar with his moods as she was with the phases of Lauzanne's temper. On Mike's face was a map of disaster; the disaster might be trivial or great. That something was wrong the girl knew, but whether it was that a valuable horse was dead, or that a mouse had eaten a hole in a grain bag she could only discover by question-

ing Gaynor, for there were never degrees of expressed emotion in Mike's facile countenance; either a deep scowl or a broad grin were the two normal conditions.

"What's the matter, Mike?" questioned Allis.

"Mather, is it?" began Gaynor, "it's just this, Miss Allis; if yer father thinks I'm goin' to stand by an' see good colts spiled in their timper just because a rapscallion b'y has got the evil intints av ould Nick himself, thin he's mistook, that's all."

"Who is it Mike—Shandy?"

"That's him, Miss. He's the divil on wheels, bangin' thim horses about as though he was King Juba."

Allis saw that Gaynor was indeed angry.

"I'll speak to father about him, Mike," she answered; "I won't have the horses abused."

"Mark my words, Miss Allis, Diablo'll take it out of his hide some day. The b'y'll monkey wit' him once too often, then there'll be no b'y left."

"May we see the horses, Mike—are they having their lie-down, or anything?"

"Not yet, Miss; they're gettin' the rub-down now; don't ye hear Diablo bastin' the boords av his stall wid that handy off hind-foot av his?"

"There's a filly for yer life," exclaimed the Trainer, rapturously, as he opened gently the door of Lucretia's box stall. "There's the straightest filly iver looked through a halter," he continued, putting his arm with the gentleness of a woman over the brown mare's beautiful neck. "Come here, ould girl," he said, coaxingly, as he drew the haltered head toward the visitors.

Mortimer looked with interest at the big, comfortable box stall, littered a foot deep with bright, clean, yellow straw. How contented and at home the mare appeared!

It seemed almost a complete recompense, this attentive care, for the cruelty he imagined race horses suffered.

"You don't tie her up?" he asked.

"Tie her up!" ejaculated Mike, a fine Celtic scorn in his voice; "I'd rather tie up a wife—if I had one," he added by way of extenuation. "No man would tie up a mare worth tin thousand dollars if she's worth a cent, an' take chances av her throwin' hersilf in the halter; av coorse she's hitched fer a bit after a gallop while she's havin' a rub-down, but that's all."

Lucretia's black nozzle came timidly forward, and the soft, velvety upper lip snuggled Allis's cheek.

"She knows ye, Miss," said Mike. "That's the way wit' horses—they're like children; they know friends, an' ye can't fool thim. Now she's sizin' ye up, Mister," as Lucretia sniffed suspiciously at Mortimer's chin, keeping a wary eye on him. "She'll know if ye like horses or not, an' I'd back her opinion agin fifty min's oaths."

Allis watched with nervous interest the investigation. She almost felt that if Lucretia liked her companion—well, it would be something less to dislike in him, at all events. Lucretia seemed turning the thing over in her mind, trying to think it out. There was some mystery about this new comer. Evidently she did not distrust him entirely, else she would have put her ears back a trifle and turned away with a little impatient warning shake of her delicate head. She always turned in that cross manner from Shandy, the stable boy. She had also discovered that the visitor was not completely a horseman; she did not investigate his pockets, nor put her head over his shoulder, as she would have done with Mr. Porter or Mike, or even with one who was a

stranger, as was Mortimer, had she felt the unmistakable something which conveyed to her mind that he was of the equine brotherhood.

"Lucretia has found you out," said Allis, presently. "You do like horses; she knows it."

"Oh, I like animals, I don't deny," Mortimer answered, "but I know very little about them—nothing about race horses."

Mike frowned and looked disparagingly at the visitor. "He must be a quare duck," he muttered to himself. That a man should know nothing of thoroughbreds was perfectly inexplicable to Gaynor. He knew many racing men whose knowledge of horseflesh was a subject for ridicule, but then they never proclaimed their ignorance, rather posed as good judges than otherwise.

But with startling inconsistency Mike explained: "There's many like ye, sir, only they don't know it, that's all; the woods is full av thim. Would ye like to give the filly a carrot, Miss?" he added, turning to Allis. "I'll bring some."

When he returned Allis gave one to Lucretia, then they passed to the next stall.

"That's a useful horse," explained the Trainer; "he's won some races in his time."

"What's his name?" asked Mortimer.

"Game Boy. He's by the Juggler. Ye remember him, don't ye?"

Mortimer was forced to confess that he didn't quite remember Juggler.

"That's strange," commented Mike, turning the big bay about with evident pride; "he won the 'Belmont,' at Jerome Park, did the ould Juggler. Ye must av heerd av that."

Mortimer compromised by admitting that he had probably forgotten it.

"Well, I haven't," declared Mike, reproachfully. "If Game Boy stands a prep this summer ye'll hear from him," he confided to Mortimer, as they left the stall. "Jist remember Game Boy; see, ye can't forget—a big bay wit' a white nigh fore leg, an' a bit rat-tailed. Yes, Game Boy's all right," monologued Mike; "but here's a better; this is Diablo. He must have tabasco in his head, fer he's got the divil's own timper. But he can gallop a bit; he can go like a quarter-horse, an' stay till the cows come home; but he's like Lauzanne acrost yonder, he's got a bee in his bonnet an' it takes a divil to ride him."

"That's hard on me, Mike," expostulated Allis. "You see, Lauzanne goes better with me in the saddle than any of the boys," she explained to Mortimer.

"The divil or angels, I was going to say, Miss, when ye interrupted me," gallantly responded Mike.

Diablo's head was tied high in a corner of the stall, for Shandy, the boy, was hard at work on him with a double hand of straw, rubbing him down. The boy kept up a peculiar whistling noise through his parted lips as he rubbed, and Diablo snapped impatiently at the halter-shank with his great white teeth as though he resented the operation.

Mortimer gazed with enthusiasm at the shining black skin that glistened like satin, or watered silk. Surely there was excuse for people loving thoroughbreds. It was an exhilaration even to look at that embodiment of physical development. It was an animate statue to the excellence of good, clean living. Somehow or other Mortimer felt that though the living creature before

him was only a horse, yet nature's laws were being adhered to, and the result was a reward of physical perfection and enjoyment of life. He began to feel that a man, or even a woman—it was the subtle presence of the woman at his side that made him involuntarily interject this clause into his inaudible thoughts—yes, even a woman of high moral attributes might find the most healthy form of interested amusement in watching the superb development of horses that were destined for no other purpose than to race and beget sons and daughters of the same wondrous stamina and courage and speed. His detestation of racing had been in reality an untutored prejudice; he had looked upon but one phase of the question, and that quite casually, as it introduced itself into his life by means of sensational betting incidents in the daily papers. To him all forms of betting were highly disastrous—most immoral. But here, like a revelation, came to him, in all its fascination, the perfect picture of the animal, which he was forced to admit stood next to man in its adornment of God's scheme of creation.

As Shandy swept his wisp of straw along the sensitive skin of Diablo's stomach, the latter shrunk from the tickling sensation, and lashed out impatiently with a powerful hind leg as though he would demolish his tormentor.

"He's not cross at all just," explained Mike; "he's bluffin', that's all. Shure a child could handle him if they'd only go the right way about it."

Then he leaned over and whispered in an aside to the visitors—"Bot' t'umbs up!" (this was Mike's favorite oath). "Diablo hates that b'y an' some day he'll do him up, mark my words."

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"Here, Shandy," he cried, turning to the rubber, "loose the Black's head an' turn him 'round."

Mortimer almost shrank with apprehension for the boy, for Diablo's ears were back on his flat, tapering neck, and his eyes looking back at them, were all white, save for the intense blue-shimmered pupil. To Mortimer that look was the incarnation of evil hatred. But the boy unsnapped the halter-shank without hesitation, and Diablo, more inquisitive than angry, came mincingly toward them, nodding his head somewhat defiantly, as much as to say that the nature of the interview would depend altogether upon their good behavior.

"See that!" ejaculated Mike, a pleasant smile of satisfaction rippling the furrows of his face; "see how he picks out the best friend the stable's got."

Diablo had stretched his lean head down, and was trying to nibble with gentle lip the carrot Allis held half hidden behind her skirt. There was none of Lucretia's timidity in Diablo's approach; it was full of an assumption of equality, of trust in the intentions of the stranger who had come with the mistress he had faith in.

"They're all like that when Miss Allis is about," explained Mike; "there never would be a bad horse if the stable-b'ys worked the same way. Tie him up, Shandy," he added. "Even the jockeys spoil their mounts," Gaynor continued in a monotone; "the horses'll gallop better for women any time—they treat thim gentler, that's why."

"Most interesting," hazarded Mortimer, feeling some acknowledgment of Mike's information was due.

"It's the trut'. Miss Allis'd take Lauzanne, or the

Black, or the little mare, an' get a better race out av thim than any jock I've seen ridin' hereabout."

"Mike," exclaimed Allis, "you flatter me; you almost make me wish that I were a jockey."

"Well, bot' t'umbs up! Ye'd av made a good un, Miss, an' that's no disrespect to ye, I'm sayin'."

Mortimer smiled condescendingly. Allis's quick eye caught his expression of amused discontent; it angered her. Mike's praise had been practically honest. To him a good jockey was the embodiment of courage and honesty and intelligence; but she knew that to Mortimer it simply meant a phase of life he considered quite outside the pale of recognized respectability. Somehow she felt that Mike's encomium had lowered her perceptibly in the opinion of this man whom she herself affected to look upon with but toleration.

They visited all the other stalls, eight of them, and listened to Mike's eulogies on the inmates. Coming down the other side of the passage, the last occupied box stall contained Lauzanne.

"Miss Porter'll tell ye about this wan," said Mike, diplomatically. "He's shaped like a good horse, an' his sire, old Lazzarone, landed many a purse, an' the 'Suburban,' too—won it on three legs, fer he was clean gone in his pins, I'll take me oath to that. He was a good horse—whin he liked. Perhaps Lauzanne'll do the same some day, fer all I know."

There was such a tone of doubt in the Trainer's voice that even Mortimer noticed it. Neither was there much praise of the big Chestnut; evidently Mike did not quite approve of him, though hesitating to say so in the presence of his mistress.

"Yes, Lauzanne is my horse," volunteered Allis. "I

even ride him in all his work now, since he took to eating the stable-boy."

"And you're not afraid?" asked Mortimer.

For answer the girl slipped quietly into the stall, and going up beside the Chestnut, who was standing sulkily with his head in the corner of his box, took him by the ear and turned him gently around.

"He's just a quiet-mannered chap, that's all," she said. "He's a big, lazy, contented old boy," and she laid her cheek against his fawn-colored nozzle. "You see," she explained, "he's got more brains than any of the other horses, and when he's abused he knows it."

"But he's grateful when he's kindly treated," commented Mortimer.

"Yes; that's why I like horses better than men."

"Oh!" the exclamation slipped from Mortimer's lips.

"Most men, I mean," she explained. "Of course, father, and Alan, and—" she hesitated; "you see," she went on to explain, "the number of my men friends is limited; but except these, and Mike, and Mr. Dixon, I like the horses best."

"I almost believe you're right, Miss Porter," concurred Mortimer; "I've known men myself that I fancy were much worse than even Diablo."

"Mike thinks Lauzanne is a bad horse," the girl said, changing the subject, "but he'll win a big race this coming season. You just keep your eye on Lauzanne. Here's your carrot, old chap," she said, stroking the horse's neck, "and we must go if we're to have that drive. Will you hitch the gray to the buggy for us, Mike?" she asked of Gaynor, as they came out of the stable, "we'll wait here."

As Mike started off there came to their ears a sound

of turmoil from Diablo's box; impatient kicks against the boards from the horse, and smothered imprecations from the boy.

"Hear that fiend!" the girl exclaimed, and there was wrath in her voice.

"He does seem a bad horse," concurred Mortimer.

"I didn't mean Diablo; it's the boy. It's all his evil doing. Oh, I've only one glove," she exclaimed. "I know where it is, though; that mischievous rascal, Lauzanne, nibbled it from the front of my jacket; I saw him do it, but forgot to pick it up."

"Allow me, Miss Porter; I'll get it for you."

"No; please don't!" with emphasis. As he started back, she laid a detaining hand on his arm. "I'd much prefer to go myself; Lauzanne distrusts strangers and might make trouble."

As the girl entered the stable, Mortimer sauntered on in the direction Mike had gone.

Allis opened the door of Lauzanne's stall, passed in, and searched in the straw for the lost glove.

X

THE noise of strife in Diablo's box had increased. There came the sound of blows on the horse's ribs; a muttered oath, and suddenly a scream of terror from the boy, drowned in an instant by the ferocious battle-cry of the enraged stallion. Mortimer, thirty yards away, heard it, and felt his heart stand still; he had never heard anything so demoniac in his life. He turned in such haste that his foot slipped on the frozen earth, and he fell heavily.

At the first sound of blows Allis had started angrily toward Diablo's box. She was at the door when Shandy's cry of terror rang out. For an instant the girl hesitated; what she saw was enough to make a strong man quail. The black stallion was loose; with crunching jaws he had fastened on the arm of Shandy, in the corner of the stall, and was trying to pull the boy down that he might trample him to death. But for a second she faltered; if ever quick action were needed, it was now.

"Back—back, Diablo! back!" she cried, as pushing past the black demon she brought her hunting-crop down with full force between his ears.

Whether it was the sound of his mistress's voice, or the staggering blow, Diablo dropped the boy like a crushed rat, and, half rearing, looked viciously at the brave girl.

"Quick! through the hay window!" commanded Allis,

standing between Shandy and the horse, and drawing the whip back over her left shoulder, ready to give it to Diablo full in the throat should he charge again.

Cowed, the boy clambered through the opening. Enraged at the sight of his assailant's escape, the horse gave another scream of defiance and sought with striking forefeet and spread jaws to pull down this new enemy. Not until then had Allis thought of calling for help; her one idea had been for the boy's safety.

Like a flash the full peril of the situation dawned upon her; perhaps her life would be given for the boy who well deserved his punishment. She had seen two stallions fight, and knew that their ferocious natures, once roused, could only be quelled by a force stronger than she possessed. Yes, surely she would be killed—her young life trampled out by the frenzied animal. Incoherently but altogether these thoughts filled her mind; also the knowledge that Mike was beyond hearing.

"Help, Mortimer!" she called.

He heard it as he reached the stable door. Even then he would have been too late had not other rescue come more quickly.

In rushing from Lauzanne's stall Allis had left the door swinging on its hinges. At the first cry of defiance from the black stallion Lauzanne had stretched high his head and sent back, with curled nostril, an answering challenge. Then with ears cocked he had waited for a charge from his natural enemy. When the mingled call of his mistress and Diablo's bugle note came to him he waited no longer, but rushed across the passage and seized the black horse by the crest just as he was overpowering the girl.

It was at that instant Mortimer reached the scene—in

his hand a stable fork he had grabbed as he raced down the passage. Even Lauzanne's attack, though it gave Allis a respite, would not have saved her life; the madly fighting horses would have kicked and trampled her to death.

"My God! Back, back, you devils!" And pushing, crowding, hugging the side of the stall, Mortimer fought his way to the girl.

Once Diablo's hoof shot out and the man's left arm, snapping like a pistol, dropped useless at his side. His brain reeled with the shock. The oddly swinging arm, dangling like a doll's, with the palm turned backward, seemed to fascinate him. Why was he there? What was he doing? Why was he hammering the horses over the head with a stable fork held tightly in his right hand? He hardly knew; his mind was clouded; he was fighting by instinct, and always crowding along the wall toward the farther corner. The girl had quite faded from his sight. Somehow he felt that he must drive the horses back, back, out of the stall.

Allis, too, was fighting; bringing the crop down with cutting force over the withers, neck, head, any part of the plunging mass in front of her. She could escape now through the opening where the boy had gone; but was not Mortimer in the same position she had been? She had seen him drop to his knees when Diablo lashed out; he must be sorely hurt; now he was reeling like a drunken man as he fought the mad brutes.

"This way," she panted, catching him by the coat, and pulling him toward the window.

Ah, that was it! He saw her now. It steadied his senses. It was the girl, and she had called him—"Mortimer!"

He seized the black horse by the crest just as he was overpowering the girl.

"Back," he yelled irrelevantly, in answer, cutting Diablo across the face with the fork. It was pandemonium.

"Get through the window!" the girl screamed in his ear. "Quick! Now!" and she pushed him toward it.

"You—first—back, you devils!" and he pressed away from her, closer to the horses, thrusting and striking with the steel-pointed fork.

The horses were giving way; Diablo was fighting half through the door, weakening before the onslaught of the powerful chestnut. Even in battle, as in a race, the stamina of the Lazzarone blood was telling; the bulldog courage of the strain was strong upon Lauzanne, now that he was roused.

"Quick! You can get out!" again called the girl.

"You first!"

This drear, repetition was the only expression Mortimer's numbed senses were equal to; but he fought with the ferocity of a tiger—his wound but enraged him.

They could both escape, Allis knew, if she could bring Mortimer to understand; but they must do it quick, if at all. It was useless. He seemed conscious of but the one idea that he must drive the fighting animals out into the passage to save her. She was not afraid now; the man's presence had driven that all away. It was useless to speak to him of the window, neither would go first; so, with her riding whip she fought side by side with Mortimer; springing back from the swift-cutting forefeet; sometimes even hugging close to the side of a horse as he lashed out from behind; and once saving her companion from being cut down by pulling him swiftly from under a raised foot. In the end the stallions were forced out into the passage, just as Mike came rushing upon the scene.

But the battle had waned. Twice Diablo had been pulled to his knees, forced down by the fierce strength that was Lauzanne's; the Black was all but conquered. The Trainer's voice checked Lauzanne's fury; even the boy had plucked up courage to return; and between them the Chestnut was driven into his stall. All the fight had been taken out of Diablo. He struggled to his feet, and stood trembling like a horse that had come out of a fierce cutting race. On his neck were the marks of Lauzanne's teeth, where they had snapped like the jaws of a trap; from his crest trickled a red stream that dripped to the floor like water from a running eave. All the fierce fire of hate had gone from his eyes. He hung his head dejectedly, and his flanks quivered. Lauzanne, too, bore evidence of the vicious strife. On one quarter, where Diablo's sharp hoof had ripped, was a cut as though he had been lashed with a sickle, and his withers were torn.

Mortimer and Allis had come out of the stall. The man, exhausted by the struggle, leaned wearily, with pale, drawn face, against the wall; the floor seemed slipping from under him; he felt a sensation of swiftly passing off into nothingness. He was sleepy, that was all; but a sleepiness to fight against—he must still fight.

"You are badly hurt." It was the girl's voice. He was almost surprised that he recognized it, everything was so confused.

He answered heavily, "Yes, I'm—I'm—I want—to lie down."

"Here, lean on my shoulder." It was Mike's voice this time. "This is bad business," the Trainer was saying; "we must get him out of this; he's nearly knocked out. Are ye all right, Miss?" turning to Allis.

CHAPTER TEN

The wounded man turned guiltily; he had forgotten the girl. Yes, surely she had been in that hell of noises with him, fighting too.

"I'm just frightened, that's all," answered Allis. "Mr. Mortimer saved me."

Had he? he wondered. How had he come in there, anyway? His mind refused to work out the problem; his side was so sore.

"Yer arm's broke," said Mike, passing to Mortimer's right side. "Come, lean on me, sir. Can ye walk? I'll put ye in the buggy and drive ye to the house."

At the first step Mortimer staggered and swayed like a drunken man. In his side were many sharp things pulling him down like grappling irons; on his head was a great weight that crushed his feet into the hard planks; his knees gave under this load, and he would have fallen but for Mike's strong arm.

"I'm—afraid;" then he set his teeth hard, his voice had sought to end the sentence in a groan of anguish; the thing that was tearing at his side had whistled in his lungs.

Allis stepped forward swiftly, and passing her arm about his waist, helped Mike lead him to the door. Twice she put her left hand up and brushed tears from her eyes; the struggle had unnerved her. Very helplessly against her swayed the man she had laughed at half an hour before. And he had been crushed saving her! But that was not why the tears came—not at all. She was unstrung.

"And he's got grit," she kept muttering to herself; "he has never even groaned."

Together they succeeded in getting him into the buggy; then, gently, Mike drove to the house.

XI

MRS. PORTER, reading a book on the veranda, heard the crunch of wheels as a buggy, slow-moving, turned into the drive. She raised her eyes leisurely, the matter of the story still in her mind; but with a quick cry of "John!" she sprang to her feet, the volume, left to itself, rustling from her lap to the floor. The mother eyes saw that something was wrong, and the mother heart felt that some evil had come to Allis. Mrs. Porter had gone white in an instant. Over her hung heavy at all times the dread of some terrible accident coming to Allis through the horses.

"Did you call, wife?" Porter asked as he came to the door. Then he sprang quickly across the veranda at sight of his wife's blanched face, and made to catch her in his arms. But she stopped him, pointing down the drive. "It's Allis, John; oh, my God!"

"No, no," he answered, "they're just coming back; here, sit down again, I'll see," and he raced down the steps just as Mike pulled up.

"What's the matter, girl?" he began.

"The young gentleman's got a bit shook up, sir; nothin' bad loike," Mike broke in hastily. The diplomatic rider, "nothin' bad," was added for Mrs. Porter's benefit, his quick eye having seen her white face.

"Miss Allis 's not hurt at all," he continued. "We'll help the young gintleman in, an' I'd best go for the docthor, I'm thinkin'."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Even as he was speaking they had helped Mortimer from the rig. He had not uttered a sound; his teeth were set hard against the agony that was in his side, and the queer dizziness that was over him left little beyond a consciousness that he was being looked after, and that if he could only keep going for a little, just use his legs a trifle, he would presently be allowed to sleep. Yes, that was what he wanted; he was so drowsy. As he went up the steps between the two men, a haggard face peered at him over the rail. It was familiar; he felt that some recognition was due, for it was a woman's face. He tried to smile. Then he was on a bed, and—and—sleep at last.

When the three men with the silence of disaster over them passed struggling into the house, Mrs. Porter threw herself on Allis's neck, and a passion of tears flooded down and damped the girl's shoulder.

"God be thanked, God be thanked!" gasped the troubled woman, and one hand that was over the girl's shoulder patted her with erratic rapidity. Then she interrupted herself. "What am I saying—it's wicked, and Mr. Mortimer like that. But I can't help it—I can't help it. Oh, Allis! my heart was in my mouth; I feel that some day you will come home like this."

At that instant Gaynor dashed by them, leaped into the buggy, and called, as he drove off: "I'll have the docthor in a jiffy; the young man's all right!" He was still talking as the whirr of swift-rushing wheels smothered out his voice, and the dust rose like a steam-cloud, almost blotting him from the landscape.

"Oh, girl! I thought you'd been killed."

"Here, sit down, mother; you're all worked up," and Allis put a cool hand on her mother's hot forehead.

But the shock to her feelings had loosed the good woman's vocabulary. At all times smouldered in her heart a hatred of racing, even of the horses. "It's the anger of God," Mrs. Porter denounced vehemently. "This gambling and racing is contrary to His law. Never a night passes, Allis, that I do not pray to God that He may open your father's eyes to the sin of racing. No good can come of it—no good has ever come of it—nothing but disaster and trouble. In a day the substance of a year is wasted. There never can be prosperity living in sin."

"Hush, mother," crooned Allis, softly. This outburst from Mrs. Porter startled the girl; it was so passionate, so vehement. When they had talked of racing in the home life the mother had nearly always preserved a reproachful silence; her attitude was understood and respected.

"I *must* speak, girl," she said again; "this sinful life is crushing me. Do you think I feel no shame when I sit in meeting and hear our good minister denounce gambling and racing? I can feel his eyes on me, and I cannot raise my voice in protest, for do not I countenance it? My people were all church people," she continued, almost apologetically, "tolerating no sin in the household. Living in sin there can be no hope for eternal life."

"I know, mother," soothed the girl; "I know just how you feel, but we can't desert father. He does not look upon it as a sin, as carrying any dishonor; he may be cheated, but he cheats no man. It can't be so sinful if there is no evil intent. And listen, mother; no matter what anybody may say, even the minister, we must both stick to father if he chooses to race horses all his life."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Ah, sweetheart!" John Porter cried out in a pleased voice, as he came out to them, "looking after mother; that's right. Cynthia has helped me fix up Mortimer. He'll be all right as soon as Mike gets back with Rathbone. I think we'd better have a cup of tea; these horses are trying on the nerves, aren't they, little woman?" and he nestled his wife's head against his side. "How did it happen, Allis? Did Mortimer slip into Diablo's box, or—"

"It was all over that rascally boy, Shandy. Diablo was just paying him back for his ill-treatment, and I went in to rescue him, and Mortimer risked his life to save mine."

"He was plucky; eh, girl?"

"He fought the Black like a hero, father. But, father, you must never think bad of Lauzanne again; if he hadn't come Mr. Mortimer would have been too late."

"It's dreadful, dreadful," moaned the mother.

Allis shot a quick look at her father. He changed the subject, and commenced talking about Alan—wondering where he was, and other irrelevant matters.

Then there was fresh divertisement as Mike rattled up, and Doctor Rathbone, who was of a great size, bustled in to where Mortimer lay.

Three smashed ribs and a broken arm was his inventory of the damage inflicted by Diablo's kick, when he came out again with Porter, in an hour.

"I'm afraid one of the splintered ribs is tickling his lung," he added, "but the fellow has got such a good nerve that I hardly discovered this unpleasant fact. He'll be all right, however; he's young, and healthy as a peach. Good nursing is the idea, and he'll get that here, of course. He doesn't want much medicine; that

we keep for our enemies,—ha! ha!" and he laughed cheerily, as if it were all a joke on the battered man.

"Thim docthers is cold-blooded divils," was Mike's comment. "Ye'd a thought they'd been throwin' dice, an' it was a horse on the other gintleman. Bot' t'umbs! it was, too. Still, if ould Saw-bones had been in the box yonder wit' Diablo, he wouldn't a-felt so funny."

"Mortimer behaved well; didn't he, Mike?" asked Porter.

"Behaved well, is it? He was like a live divil; punched thim two big stallions till they took water an' backed out. My word! whin first I see him come to the stable wit' Miss Allis, thinks I, here's wan av thim city chumps; he made me tired. An' whin he talked about Lauzanne's knees, m'aning his hocks, I had to hide me head in a grain bag. But if ye'd seen him handle that fork, bastin' the Black, ye'd a thought it was single sticks he was at, wit' a thousand dollars fer a knock-out."

"One can't always tell how a colt will shape, can they, Mike?" spoke Porter, for Mike's fanciful description was almost bringing a smile to Mrs. Porter's troubled face.

"Ye can't, sor, an' yer next the trut' there. I've seen a herrin'-gutted weed av a two-year-old—I remember wan now; he was a Lexington. It was at Saratoga; an' bot' t'umbs! he just made hacks av iverythin' in soight—spread-eagled his field. Ye wouldn't a-give two dollars fer him, an' he come out an' cleaned up the Troy Stake, like the great horse he was."

"And you think Mortimer has turned out something like that; eh, Mike?"

"Well, fer a man that knows no more av horses than I

know av the strology av stars, he's a hot wan, an' that's the God's trut'."

Mortimer's gallant act had roused the Irishman's admiration. He would have done as much himself, but that would have been expected of a horseman, constantly encountering danger; that an office man, to be pitied in his ignorance, should have fearlessly entered the stall with the fighting stallions was quite a different matter.

Even Allis, with her more highly developed sense of character analyzation, felt something of this same influence. She had needed some such manifestation of Mortimer's integral force, and this had come with romantic intensity in the tragic box-stall scene. This drama of the stable had aroused no polished rhetoric; Mortimer's declamation had been unconventional in the extreme. "Back, you devils!" he had rendered with explosive fierceness, oblivious of everything but that he must save the girl. The words still rang in the ears of Allis, and also the echo of her own cry when in peril, "Mortimer!" There must have been a foreshadowing in her soul of the man's reliability, though she knew it not.

Even without the doctor's orders, it was patent that Mortimer must remain at Ringwood for a few days.

It was as if Philip Crane, playing with all his intense subtlety, had met his master in Fate; the grim arbiter of man's ways had pushed forward a chessman to occupy a certain square on the board for a time.

Mortimer had been most decisively smashed up, but his immense physique had wonderful recuperative powers. The bone-setting and the attendant fever were discounted by his vitality, and his progress toward recovery was marvelous.

XII

CRANE heard of the accident on one of his visits to Brookfield a couple of days later, and of course must hurry to Ringwood to see his employee. It happened that the Reverend Mr. Dolman graced the Porter home with his presence the same evening that Crane was there.

Naturally the paramount subject of interest was the narrow escape of Miss Allis; but the individuality of discussion gradually merged into a crusade against racing, led by the zealous clergyman. John Porter viewed this trend with no little trepidation of feeling.

It was Mrs. Porter who precipitated matters by piously attributing Allis's escape to Providence.

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly!" Mr. Dolman said, putting the points of his fingers together in front of his lean chest. He paused a moment, and Porter groaned inwardly; he knew that attitude. The fingers were rapiers, stilettos; presently their owner would thrust, with cutting phrase, proving that they were all indeed a very bad lot. Perhaps John Porter would have resented this angrily had he not felt that the Reverend Inquisitor was really honest in his beliefs, albeit intolerably narrow in his conclusions.

Dolman broke the temporary silence. "But we shouldn't tempt Providence by worshiping false images. Love of animals is commendable—commendable"—he emphasized this slight concession—"but race horses always appeal to me as instruments of the Evil One."

"It wasn't the horse's fault at all, Mr. Dolman," Allis interposed, "but just a depraved human's. It was the boy Shandy's fault."

"I wasn't thinking of one horse," continued the minister, airily; "I meant race horses in general."

"I think Mr. Dolman is right," ventured Mrs. Porter, hesitatingly; "it's flying in the face of Providence for a girl to go amongst those race horses."

"Bad-tempered men make them vicious, mother," Allis said; "and I believe that Shandy's punishment was the visitation of Providence, if there was any."

The Reverend Dolman's face took on an austere look. It was an insult to the divine powers to assert that they had taken the part of a race horse. But he turned the point to his own ends. "It's quite wrong to abuse the noble animal; and that's one reason why I hold that racing is contrary to the Creator's intentions, quite apart from the evil effect it has on morals."

"Are all men immoral who race, Mr. Dolman?" John Porter asked.

His question forced Dolman to define his position. Porter always liked things simplified; racing was either wrong in principle or right. Dolman found him rather a difficult man to tackle. He had this irritating way of brushing aside generalization and forcing the speaker to get back to first principles.

The reverend gentleman proceeded cautiously. "I should hardly care to go so far as that—to make the rule absolute; a very strong man might escape contamination, perhaps."

Mrs. Porter sighed audibly. The minister was weakening most lamentably, giving her husband a loophole to escape.

"I hardly think racing quite so bad as it is generally supposed to be," interposed Crane, feeling that Porter was being pilloried somewhat. He received a reproachful look from Mrs. Porter for his pains.

"I've never seen any good come of it," retorted Dolman. "A Christian man must feel that he is encouraging gambling if he countenances racing, for they contend that without betting racing is impossible."

"Everything in life is pretty much of a gamble," Porter drawled, lazily; "there aren't any such things. The ships that go to sea, the farmer's crop—everything is more or less a matter of chance. If a man goes straight he has a fairly easy time with his conscience, no matter what he's at; but if he doesn't, well, he'd better go hungry."

"A great many very honorable men are racing today," added Crane; "men who have built up large fortunes through honest dealing, and wouldn't be racing if they felt that it was either unchristian or dishonorable."

"They can't be Christians if they countenance gambling," asserted the minister, doggedly.

It occurred to Mortimer that whenever the discussion took broader lines, Dolman drew it back into the narrow cell of his own convictions.

Porter scratched his head perplexedly. They had been discussing the moral influence of racing; this seemed more like theology.

"It is certainly unchristian," commented Mrs. Porter, severely.

"I haven't seen much Christian spirit in any business," said Porter, quietly; "they all seem more a matter of written agreements. In fact there's more done on honor in racing than in any of the business gambles. A

man that's crooked in racing is sure to come to grief in the long run."

Crane shifted in his chair, and Dolman coughed deprecatingly.

"For my part," continued Porter, "I've never found it necessary to do anything I'm ashamed of in racing."

His wife saw an opening. "But, John dear, you were treated most shamefully last year; a dishonest boy hauled your horse—"

"Pulled, mother," interposed Allis; "pulled father's horse, you mean."

"Perhaps, though I fail to see where the difference can be, if the horse ran the other way and your father lost."

Porter smiled indulgently. "The boy was punished, Helen," he said. "Dishonesty is not tolerated on the race course."

"Yes, but something is always happening," she continued in lament. "It's contrary to the law of the church, John. It seems just like a visitation of divine wrath the way things happen. And you're so sanguine, John; last year you were going to win a big race with Diablo when he threw his leg—"

"Threw a splint, mother," prompted Allis.

"I thought your father said it was his leg had something the matter with it," argued Mrs. Porter.

"The splint was on his leg, mother dear."

"Well, I'm not familiar with racing phrases, I must say, though I should be, goodness knows; I hear little else. And talk of cruelty to animals!" she turned to Mr. Dolman; "they burned the poor beast's leg with hot irons—"

The minister held up his hands in horror.

"It didn't give him as much pain as the doctor gave Mr. Mortimer setting his arm," declared Allis.

"But it was racing injured the horse's leg," interposed Dolman.

"But your horse has got a ringbone, Mr. Dolman," said Allis, "and a spavin, too. I've been looking at him. That's because you drive him too fast on hard roads. And his feet are contracted from neglect in shoeing. It's just cruel the way that poor old horse has been neglected. Race horses are much better taken care of."

Allis's sudden onslaught switched Mr. Dolman from the aggressive to the defensive with great celerity.

"I confess I know very little about horses," he was forced to apologize; then, with something of asperity, "the spiritual welfare of my congregation takes up my entire time."

This rebuke caused a momentary silence, and Dolman, turning to Mortimer, said, "I hope you don't approve of racing, sir."

Mortimer didn't, but a look from Allis's eyes inexplicably enough caused him to hedge very considerably in his reply.

"I know nothing about the race course," he said, "but from what I see of the thoroughbreds I believe a man would have to be of very low order if their noble natures did not appeal to him. I think that courage, and honesty, and gentleness—they all seem to have it—must always have a good influence. Why, sir," he continued, with a touch of excitement, "I think a man would be ashamed to feel that he was making himself lower than the horses he had to do with."

Allis looked grateful. Even Porter turned half about in his chair, and gazed with a touch of wonderment at

the battered young man who had substituted common sense for sophistical reasoning.

The reverend gentleman frowned. "It's not the horses at all," he said, "it's the men who are disreputable."

Mrs. Porter gave a little warning cough. In his zealousness Mr. Dolman might anger her husband, then his logic would avail little.

"The men are like the horses," commented Porter, "some bad and some good. They average about the same as they do in anything else, mostly good, I think. Of course, when you get a bad one he stands out and everybody sees him."

"And sometimes horses—and men, too, I suppose—get a bad name when they don't deserve it," added Allis. "Everybody says Lauzanne is bad, but I know he's not."

"That was a case of this dreadful dishonesty," said Mrs. Porter, speaking hastily. She turned in an explanatory way to Crane. "You know, Mr. Crane, last summer a rascally man sold my husband a crooked horse. Now, John, what are you laughing at?" for her husband was shaking in his chair.

"I was wondering what a crooked horse would look like," he answered, and there were sobs in his voice.

"Why, John, when you brought him home you said he was crooked."

As usual, Allis straightened matters out: "It was the man who was crooked. Mother means Lauzanne," she continued.

"Yes," proceeded the good woman, "a Mr. Langdon, I remember now, treated my husband most shamefully over this horse."

Crane winced. He would have preferred thumbscrews just then.

"John is honest himself," went on Mrs. Porter, "and he believes other men, and this horse had some drug given him to make him look nice, so that my husband would buy him."

"Shameful," protested Dolman. "Are men allowed to give horses drugs?" he appealed to Mr. Porter.

"No; the racing law is very strict on that point."

"But evidently it is done," contended Dolman.

"I think there's very little of it," said Porter.

This turn of the conversation made Crane feel very uneasy. "Do you think, Mr. Porter," he asked, "that there was anything of that sort over Lauzanne? Do you think Langdon would—" He hesitated.

"Mr. Langdon has a tolerable idea of what I think," answered Porter. "I shouldn't trust that man too much if I were you. He's got cunning enough, though, to run straight with a man like yourself, who has a horse or two in his stable, and doesn't go in for betting very heavily."

"I know very little about him," protested Crane; "and, as you say, he will probably act quite straightforward with me, at least."

"Yes," continued Porter, half wearily, as though he wished to finish the distasteful discussion; "there are black sheep in racing as there are in everything else. My own opinion is that the most of the talk we hear about crooked racing is simply talk. At least nine out of ten races are honestly run—the best horse wins. I would rather cut off my right hand than steal a race, and yet last summer it was said that I had pulled Lucretia."

"I never heard of that, John," cried Mrs. Porter, in astonishment.

"No, you didn't," dryly answered her husband.

Allis smiled; she had settled that part of it with her father at the time.

"If you'll excuse me," began Crane, rising, "I think Mr. Mortimer is getting tired. I believe I'll jog back to Brookfield."

Reluctantly the Reverend Dolman rose, too. He felt, somehow, that the atmosphere of racing had smothered his expostulation—that he had made little headway. The intense honesty that was John Porter's shielded him about almost as perfectly as a higher form of belief might have done.

But with almost a worldly cunning it occurred to the clergyman that he could turn the drawn battle into a victory for the church; and as they stood for a minute in the gentle bustle of leave-taking, he said: "The ever-continuing fight that I carry on against the various forms of gambling must necessarily take on at times almost a personal aspect—" he was addressing Mr. Porter, ostensibly—"but in reality it is not quite so. I think I understand your position, Mr. Porter, and—and—what shall I say—personally I feel that the wickedness of racing doesn't appeal to you as a great contamination; you withstand it, but you will forgive me saying so, thousands have not the same strength of character."

Porter made a deprecatory gesture, but Dolman proceeded. "What I was going to say is, that you possibly realize this yourself. You have acted so wisely, with what I would call Christian forethought, in placing your son, Alan, in a different walk in life, and—" he

turned with a grave bow in Crane's direction—"and in good hands, too."

"His mother wished it," Porter said, simply.

"Yes, John was very good about Alan's future," the mother concurred. "But, husband, you quite agreed that it was much better for Alan to be in the bank than possibly drifting into association with—well, such dishonorable men as this Mr. Langdon and his friends. He is so much better off," she continued, "with young men such as Mr. Crane would have about him."

The Reverend Dolman smiled meekly, but it was in triumph. He had called attention to an act which spoke far louder than Mr. Porter's disclaiming words.

Porter was not at all deceived by the minister; in fact, he rather admired the other's cleverness in beating him on the post. He gave a little laugh as he said: "I should not have succeeded very well in a bank. I am more at home with the horses than I am with figures; but I expect I would have gone fairly straight, and hope the boy will do the same. I fancy one of the great troubles about banking is to keep the men honest, the temptation of handling so much money being great. They seem to have more chances to steal than men on the race course."

As usual, Porter seemed to be speaking out of his thoughts and without malice; no one took offense. It was simply a straightforward answer to Dolman's charge.

Porter had simply summed up the whole business in a very small nutshell. That there was temptation everywhere, and that honest men and thieves were to be found on race courses, in banks, in every business, but that, like the horses, a fair share of them were honest.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"Speaking materially of race horses quite outside of the moral aspect," said Crane, as he was taking his leave, "you'll have to be mighty careful of that Diablo, Mr. Porter, when Miss Allis is about; he seems a vindictive brute."

"Yes, John; you'll have to sell him right away; I'll be frightened to death while he's about the place."

"I shall never be a bit afraid of him," remonstrated Allis; "Shandy, who made all the mischief, has been discharged."

"Diablo has always been more trouble than he's worth," said Porter. "I thought he was going to be a good horse, but he isn't; and if he has taken to eating people I'll give him away some day. I wouldn't sell him as a good horse, and nobody'd buy a man-eater."

"I'll buy him when you make up your mind, Mr. Porter," exclaimed Crane, somewhat eagerly. "I have nobody sweet enough to tempt his appetite. In the meantime, Miss Allis, if I were you I should keep away from him."

Then presently, with good-nights and parting words of warning about Diablo, the guests were gone; and Mortimer, having declined Porter's proffered help, was somewhat awkwardly—having but one good hand—preparing to retire in Alan's room.

His mind worked somewhat faster than his fingers; several new problems had been given it to labor over within the compass of a single moon. That horse racing should ever become a disturbing interest in his life had seemed very improbable; now it was like a gale about his soul, it swayed him. He was storm-tossed in the disturbing element; he could come to no satisfying conclusion. On the one hand the thoroughbred horses were

to be admired; they were brave and true, creatures of love. Also Porter was an honest man, the one thing he admired above all else.

And Miss Allis! Somehow or other his eyes wandered to a picture that rested on a mantelpiece in the room. He took it down, looking furtively over his shoulder as he did so, and taking it close under the lamp that was on the table sat and gazed steadfastly into the girlish face.

Even in the photograph the big, wondrous eyes seemed to say, "What of wrong, if we are not wrong?" That was the atmosphere so thoroughly straightforward and honest that wrong failed of contamination.

Still it was unconvincing to Mortimer. The horses might be good, the man honest, and the girl pure and sweet, but the life itself was distasteful. Reason as one might, it was allied to gambling.

Mortimer rose with a sigh, the whole thing wearied him. Why should he distress his mind over the matter? As he put the photograph back on the mantel he held it for an instant, then suddenly, with a nervous, awkward gesture, brought it to his lips and kissed the eyes that seemed to command tribute.

The movement twisted his broken-ribbed side and an agony of pain came to him in quick retribution. It was as though the involuntary kiss had lurched him forward into a futurity of misery. The spasm loosed beads of perspiration which stood cold on his forehead. Swift taken from the stimulant of his thoughts, his nerves overtaxed by the evening, jangled discordantly, and he crept into bed, feeling an unutterable depression as though the room was filled with evil, threatening spirits.

XIII

In coincidence the two men, Mortimer and Crane, had similar thoughts the day after Mr. Dolman's discussion; and, rather remarkably, their deductions were alike, having the same subject of mental retrospect—Allis Porter.

It was evident that outside of her family little interested her but horses; certainly not a very lofty aspiration. When the conversation had dealt with broad principles, men and their shortcomings, the previous evening, she had centralized it in Lauzanne, picturing him as symbolical of good acts and evil repute. Patently it was difficult to become interested in such a young woman; actually she monopolized their thoughts. Inconsistently the fair offender felt no recoil of this somewhat distressing situation; her mind busied itself chiefly over the reclamation of Lauzanne.

By inheritance all the qualities of a good horse had come to him except a submissive temper. Allis worked on the theory that his disposition had been set awry by injudicious handling; that unlimited patience would cause him to forget all that. He could gallop, else he had not won the race in which he beat The Dutchman. That he had needed a stimulant that day was because he had been soured and would not try with his wits about him.

From the time of coming back to Ringwood Allis had ridden him in all his exercise gallops, and had

asked Mike personally to supervise his stable education. It had taken all her great patience, all her youthful enthusiasm and faith, for the Chestnut had notions beyond all belief. At first, missing the abuse, he almost seemed to thirst for it; tried the gentle girl in every way—sulked, and loafed, and took little streaks of trying to cut the course, and made false breaks as though he were going to run with a full vigor; even laid hold of the horses with his teeth when opportunity offered. These antics did not break the girl's faith; she rode him with the gentle hand a woman knows and a horse soon learns to appreciate, and gave him to understand that he was to have fair treatment.

Porter viewed this continuous performance with silent skepticism. He did not abuse horses himself, neither did he put up with too much nonsense from them. To him they were like children, needing a lot of tolerant kindness, but, also, at times, to be greatly improved by a sound whipping. Once when he suggested something of this sort to Allis, saying that Lauzanne was a spoiled child, she admitted he was, but that thoughtless cruelty and not indulgence had done the harm, therefore kindness was the cure.

The first sign of regeneration was the implicit faith that Lauzanne began to place in his young mistress. At first when she put up a hand to pet him he would jerk his head away in affright; now he snuggled her shoulder, or nibbled at her glove in full spirit of comradarie. Then one day in a gallop came a stronger manifestation, a brief minute of exhilaration, with after-hours of thankfulness, and beyond that, alas for the uncertainty of a spoiled temper, an added period of wallowing in the Slough of Despond!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It was on a crisp, sparkling morning, and with Shandy—it was before his downfall—on Lucretia, another stable lad, Ned Carter, on Game Boy, and Allis on Lauzanne, the three swung off for a working gallop of a mile or more. Lauzanne was in an inquisitive mood, as the other two raced on in front. What was his light-weighted rider up to anyway? Why did she always leave it to him to do just as he liked? Was she really deceiving him? Did she wish him to lie back there behind the others always? He fell to wondering what she would do if he were to take hold of the bit and spread his big muscles in one rushing gallop, and go on past the others and get home to the feed box first. He rattled the snaffle in his mouth with nervous indecision—he had a notion to try it.

"Steady, my boy!" said Allis, as she slipped the reins back through her fingers till they stretched tight. A dozen times she had sought in vain to make him think she did not wish him to gallop, but something in the crisp air this morning threw him off his guard. Why should he be forced to lag behind? He stretched the arch of his neck straight till the bit held hard in his mouth; the ears pitched forward in eager point; the great frame under the girl quivered and sank closer to earth; the roar of his beating hoofs came up to her ears, muffled by the drive of the wind that was now a gale as the Chestnut raced into it with the speed of an express. How her heart sang! Here was speed, and with such stride—strong, and straight, and true! Low she crouched, and her call to Lauzanne was but a joyous whisper. Her small hands were framed in steel, strength to steady the big Chestnut as he swung round the course glued to the rail. On Lauzanne sped, and to

the rhythm of his big heaving quarters the girl's soul sang a song of delight. At last, at last was coming her reward.

And then, just when everything had been achieved, when the great gallop had brought them half up the stretch, something came to Lauzanne—perhaps the memory of the whipping finishes; at any rate, he curled up like a dog, threw his ears back—Allis could feel the sudden stiff prop of the forelegs as he set himself against the rush of speed—and in a dozen strides he was Lauzanne again, Lauzanne the Despised.

And so it had gone on for weeks, Allis working out her theory up to the time of the trouble over Diablo. There was something in the girl's quiet determination that was masterful; perhaps that was why she had always had her own way at home. Now this mastery was spreading out wonderfully; Lauzanne, and Mike, and her father, and Crane, and Mortimer, all in different degrees of subjection, but, as Fate knew, all subject.

Mrs. Porter's continual lament on the subject of racing had given Crane a keynote for his line of action. It was the day following her scoring of the tolerant husband that Crane revisited Ringwood full of his new idea.

He had an impulse to buy back Lauzanne. For almost the first time in his life he experienced twinges of remorse; this was because of Allis. Porter's affairs were in a bad way, and he would probably accept eagerly an offer from Crane to lighten his load. Individually he cared little for Porter's financial troubles, but it was a good opportunity to prepare the way for a stronger pressing of his suit with the girl. With his usual fine discrimination he spoke to Mrs. Porter first, intimating

never so slightly that her words had won his entire sympathy; that if her husband would sell any of the horses he would buy them.

There was a convincing sincerity about Crane at all times; what he did he did with the full vigor of a man believing in its truth. One might almost have suspected that he deceived himself, that he had no conception of the unrighteousness of his acts. At any rate, he imposed most successfully upon the mother of Allis. Quite egotistically she attributed to herself the trend of his friendship. In racing phrase, Crane was out for a killing and playing his cards with consummate skill.

With the master of Ringwood he went very straight to the point. This was possible, as Porter could not hesitate to discuss his financial condition with his banker. Crane offered to buy Lucretia; this with him was purely a speculation, but Porter would not part with his little mare. Then the banker spoke of Lauzanne, saying that he felt somewhat guilty since learning the previous evening that the horse had been doped. Porter failed to see where Crane had anything to do with it. But the latter insisted that he had unwittingly helped Langdon by speaking of Lauzanne as a good horse. He had known nothing of the matter, beyond that his trainer had assured him the horse would win; in fact, he had backed him.

Porter laughed at the idea that responsibility could attach to Crane. As to the Chestnut, he was not worth a tenth of the three thousand he had cost—that was well known; and if Crane or any other man sought to buy him at that price it would savor too much of charity. At any rate, Lauzanne belonged to Allis, and Crane would have to bargain with her,

Then there was Diablo, Crane said; his presence was a menace to Miss Porter.

"I've nursed him for a good while," Porter replied, "and he's a bad betting proposition—he's too uncertain. You don't want such a horse as that—nobody does. I'll keep him a bit longer, and put him in a handicap or two where the purse will be worth running for, and I won't have to back him; he'll get in with a feather-weight, and some day may take it into his head to gallop, though he's a rank bad one."

Crane did not press the point; he understood Porter's motives throughout. He knew the master of Ringwood was an unchanging man, very set in his ways, adhering closely to his plans and opinions. So Crane went back to Brookfield without purchasing a horse, saying as he left, "I claim first privilege when you wish to sell."

He had talked to Porter in the stable, and Mike, busy near by, heard that part of their conversation referring to the horses.

"They haven't got money enough in the bank to take the little mare from us yet, have they, Mike?" Porter said to Gaynor, full of his pride in Lucretia.

"That they haven't, sor," replied Mike, proudly. "But, faith, I wish th' gint hadn't come a-tryin' to buy her; it's bad luck to turn down a big offer fer any horse."

Porter smiled indulgently. This stable superstition did not appeal to him.

"It would a-broke the bad luck, sor, to have let him took the Black."

"It would have broken his bank, you mean, Mike."

"Well, he'll break somewan's back here yet, an' I'm tellin' you that sthraight. They say a black cat's full

av th' divil, but Diablo's ould Nick hisself, though I'm sayin' it was th' b'y Shandy's fault sp'ilin' him. An' if it wasn't fer Miss Allis it's a pity you couldn't a-sold him the Chestnut. He's a sawhorse—he's as heavy in th' head as a bag of salt; he'll never do no good to nobody. Them's the kind as kapes a man poor, eatin' their heads off, an' wan horse, or maybe two, in the stable earnin' th' oats fer them. It's chaper to cut th' t'roats av such cattle."

"I believe you're right, Mike," Porter answered, quietly, as he left the stable.

Crane, driving back to Brookfield, turned over in his mind the matter of his mission. He was satisfied. He had succeeded in the main objective point. It would have been a good move to have acquired Lucretia, to have tempted her owner to part with her for ready money in sight. The money would soon have disappeared; then Porter, with a lot of bad horses on his hand, would almost certainly have come more firmly into the grasp of Crane. The offer to buy Lauzanne had been a bit of saving grace, a faint, generous impulse, begot of Allis's regenerating influence; but Crane had discovered that Porter did not at all suspect him of interest in the fraud—that was a great something. He had also established himself firmly in Mrs. Porter's good graces, he could see. It would be indeed strange if in the end he did not succeed completely.

XIV

SHANDY'S escapade with Diablo had brought a new trouble to Mike Gaynor.

The boy had been discharged with a severe reprimand from Mr. Porter, and a punctuation mark of disapproval from the Trainer's horn-like hand. He had departed from Ringwood inwardly swearing revenge upon everybody connected with that place; against Diablo he was particularly virulent.

Mike tried to secure a boy in the Brookfield neighborhood to ride Diablo in his work, but Shandy's evil tongue wagged so blatantly about the horse's bad temper that no lad could be found to take on in the stables. Ned Carter might have ridden Diablo at work, but the big Black was indeed a horse of many ideas. He had taken a notion to gallop kindly while accompanied by Lucretia and Lauzanne; worked alone he sulked and was as awkward as a broncho of the plains. Also he disliked Carter—seemed to associate his personality with that of Shandy's.

Mike's discontent over the hitch spread to John Porter. It was too bad; the horses had been doing so well. For three days Diablo had no gallop. On the fourth Porter determined to ride the horse himself; he would not be beaten out by an ungrateful whelp like Shandy. In his day he had been a famous gentleman jock, and still light enough to ride work.

"I don't like the idea, sor; it's not good enough," remonstrated Mike.

But his master was obdurate. If Allis rode Lauzanne, why shouldn't he ride Diablo?

Gaynor would have ridden the horse himself rather than have his master do so, but he had a bad leg. Once upon a time it had been crushed against the rail. Somebody must ride Diablo; the horse, naturally high-strung, was becoming wild with nervousness through being knocked out of his work.

For three days after his discharge Shandy sat brooding with the low cunning of a forest animal over his fancied ill-treatment. More than once he had received money from Langdon for touting off to him Porter's stable matters; now in his unreasoning bitterness he contrasted Langdon and Porter.

"Dick's white, he is, an' I'll go git a job from him. I gits half eat by that crazy skate, an' fired without a cent fer it. God drat 'em!" he muttered; "I'll get even, or know why. They'll put Ned up on Diablo, will they? The sneak! He split on me fer beltin' the Black, I know, damn him! They ain't got another boy an' they won't git one. I'll fix that stiff, Carter, too; then they won't have no boy."

He drank beer, and as it irritated his ferret mind a devilish plot came into his being and took possession of him—a plot easy of execution because of his familiarity with the Ringwood stables.

That night he slipped through the dark, like a hyena pup, to Ringwood. That the stable was locked mattered not. More than once, out of laziness, Shandy had shirked going to Mike's quarters for the keys and had found ingress by a small window, a foot square, through

which the soiled straw bedding was thrown into the yard. Standing on the dung heap, Shandy worked open the board slide that closed this window, and wormed his weasel-form through the small opening. He passed down the passage between the stalls and entered a saddle room at the farther end.

"The bloomin' thing used to be on the fourth peg," he muttered, drawing his small figure up on tiptoe and feeling along the wall for something. "Blow me!" and he chuckled fiendishly as his fingers encountered the cold steel of a bit, "I'd know that snaffle in hell, if I got a feel of it."

There was a patent device of a twist and a loose ring in the center of the bit he clutched, which Porter had devised for Diablo's hard mouth.

Shandy gave the bridle a swing, and it clattered to the floor from its peg. Diablo snorted and pawed the planks of his stall nervously.

"All right, my buck," hissed Shandy, "you wait till to-morror; you'll git the run of yer life, I'm thinkin', damn their eyes!" and he went off into a perfect torrent of imprecation against everybody at Ringwood, hushing his voice to a snarling whisper. Then he shut the door of the saddle room, sat down on the floor and pulled from his pocket a knife and stub of candle. He lighted the latter and held it flame down till a few drops of wax formed a tiny lake; into this he stuck the candle upright, shielding its flame with his coat. He opened the knife and laying it down, inspected minutely the bridle which lay across his leg.

"It's Diablo's right enough," he said; "I couldn't be mistook on the bit, nor them strong lines."

He picked up the knife, and holding the leather rein

Holding the leather rein across the palm of his left hand he started to saw it gently with the blade.

across the palm of his left hand started to saw it gently with the blade. Almost instantly he left off. "Of all the bloomin' ijits! God drat me fer a goat! He'd feel that cut the first slip through his fingers the leather took."

He gathered in the rein until he had it six inches from the bit. There he cut, stopping many times, and doubling the leather close to the light to see how deep he had penetrated.

"There, Mr. Bloody Ned!" he exclaimed at last, as inspection showed that only the outer hard shell of the leather remained intact. "That'll just hold till the Black takes one of his cranky spells, an' you give him a stiff pull. God help you then!" Even this was a blasphemous cry of exultation; not a plea for divine assistance for the man he plotted against.

His next move proved that his cunning was of an exceptional order. From his coat pocket he brought forth a pill box. In this receptacle Shandy dipped a forefinger, and rubbed into the fresh cut of the leather a trifle of blackened axle grease which he had taken from a wagon wheel before starting out. Then he wiped the rein with his coat tail and looked at it admiringly.

"The bloke won't see that, blast him!"

He hung the bridle up in its place, put out the candle, dropped it in his pocket and made his way from the stable.

As he passed Diablo's stall the big Black snorted again, and plunged in affright.

"You'll get enough of that to-morror," sneered the boy. "I hope you and Ned both break your damn necks. Fer two cents I'd drop somethin' in your feed-box that'd

settle you right now; but it's the skunk as split on me I want to get even with."

Shandy trudged back to where he nested in Brookfield and soon slept with calm restfulness, as though no evil had ever homed in his heart. In the first gray of the early morning he rose and went out to the race course.

XV

THE course near Ringwood had formerly been a trotting track, and was still used at irregular intervals for the harness horses. In its primitive days a small, square, box-like structure had done duty as a Judges' Stand. With other improvements a larger structure had been erected a hundred yards higher up the stretch.

It was to the little old stand that Shandy took his way. Inside he waited for the coming of Gaynor's string of gallopers as supremely happy in his unrighteous work as any evil-minded boy might be at the prospect of unlimited mischief.

"Ned'll ride Diablo, sure; there's nothin' else to it," he muttered. "I hope he breaks his blasted neck. I'll pay 'em out fer turnin' me off like a dog," he continued, savagely, the small ferret eyes blazing with fury. "I'll learn the damn— Hello!" His sharp ears had caught the muffled sound of hoofs thudding the turf in a slow, measured walk. He peeped between the boards.

"Yes, it's Mike. And the girl, too—blast her! She blamed me fer near bein' eat alive by that black devil of a dope horse. Hell!"

This ambiguous exclamation was occasioned by the sight of his former master springing into the saddle on Diablo's back.

"That's the game, eh? God strike me dead! I hope you git enough of him. My arms ache yet from bein' near pulled out of the sockets by that leather-mouthed

brute. Gee, if the boss hasn't got spurs on! If he ever tickles the Black wit' 'em—say, boys, there'll be a merry hell to pay, and no pitch hot."

The young Arab spoke to the boards as though they were partners in his iniquity. Then he chuckled diabolically, as in fancy he saw Porter being trampled by the horse.

"The girl's on Lauzanne," he muttered; "she's the best in the lot, if she did run me down. A ridin' that sorrel mut, too, when she ought to be in the house washin' dishes. A woman ain't got no more business hangin' 'round the stable than a man's got in the kitchen. Petticoats is the devil; I never could abide 'em."

Shandy sometimes harked back to his early English Whitechapel, for he had come from the old country, and had brought with him all the depravity he could acquire in the first five years of his existence there.

"Ned's got the soft snap in that blasted bunch," as his eye discovered Carter on Lucretia. "He's slipped me this go, but I've nobbled the boss, so I don't care. I'm next 'em this trip."

As the three horses and their riders came on to the course he pulled out a cheap stop-watch Langdon had equipped him with for his touting, and started and stopped it several times.

"You'll pay fer their feed, you damn ole skinflint," he was apostrophizing Porter, "an' I'll be next the best they can do, an' stan' in on the rake-off. Gee! I thought they was out fer a trial," he muttered, looking disconsolately at the three as they cantered the first part of the journey. "I'll ketch 'em at the half, on the off chance," he added.

But though the timepiece in his hand clicked impatiently, after he pressed the stem with his thumb, as Diablo's black nozzle showed past the half-mile post, the three horses still cantered.

Lauzanne was loping leisurely with the action of a wooden rocking-horse. Lucretia, her long, in-tipped ears cocked eagerly forward, was throwing her head impatiently into the air as though pleading for just one strong gallop. Diablo's neck was arched like the half of a cupid's bow; his head, almost against his chest, hung heavy in the reins tight-drawn in Porter's strong hands. His eyes, showing full of a suspicious whiteness, stood out from his lean, bony head; they were possessed of a fretful, impatient look. Froth flecked back from the nervous, quivering lips, and spattered against his black satin-skinned chest, where it hung like seafoam on holding sand.

"Whoa! Steady, old boy!" Porter was coaxing soothingly. "Steady, boy!"

"The ease up has put the very deuce into this fellow," he flung over his shoulder to Allis, who was at Diablo's quarter. "He's a hard-mouthed brute if ever there was one."

"He'll be all right, dad," she called forward, raising her voice, for the wind cut her breath; "Shandy rode him with a heavy hand, that's why."

"I'll put a rubber bit in his mouth, to soften it," he pumped brokenly. "Let out a wrap, girl, and we'll breeze them up the stretch; come on. Carter, get to the front with the mare."

A quarter of a mile from the finish the horses raced into a swinging stride. Diablo was simply mad with a desire to gallop; but in the saddle was his master; no

horse ever did as he wished with John Porter. Battling against the sharps his honesty might handicap him out of the strife, but in the saddle the elation of movement crept into his sinews, and he was superb, a king. As a jockey, he would have been unsurpassed. It filled his heart with delight to play with the fierce, imperious animal he rode.

"Steady, my boy—no you don't!" This as Diablo stuck his neck straight out like an arrow and sought to hold the bit tight against the bridle teeth, that he might race at his own sweet will. Back came the right hand, then the left; three vicious saws, and the bit was loose and Diablo's head drawn down again close to the martingale. Lucretia and Lauzanne were pulling to the front.

"Go on!" called Porter to Ned Carter; "I want to see the little mare in her stride. Take them out at three-quarter gallop down the back stretch. I'll be treading your heels off."

By this they were opposite the old stand, where Shandy was hiding. The boy, surmising that a gallop was on, and anxious to see them as they rounded the turn going down the back, had knocked a board loose to widen the crack. As the horses came abreast, Shandy, leaning forward in his eagerness, dislodged it at the top, and it fell with a clatter, carrying him half through the opening. The wind was blowing fair across the little stand, so the scent of the boy came to Diablo's nostrils at the same instant the startling noise reached his nervous ears. In a swerve he almost stopped, every muscle of his big body trembling in affright. Porter was nearly thrown from his seat by this crouching side step; the horse seemed to shrink from under him. Just

for an instant, but the reins had flapped loose against the wet neck and Diablo felt freedom. With a snort he plunged forward like a wounded buck, and raced madly after Lucretia, who had bolted when the crash came.

Porter had lost a stirrup in the sudden twist, and the reins had slipped through his fingers as he grabbed the mane on Diablo's wither to pull his weight back into the saddle.

Now the black neck was straight and taut, flat-capped by the slim ears that lay close to the throat-latch. The thunder of his pounding hoofs reached to the ears of Lucretia and Lauzanne in front, and urged them onward. Carter had sat down in the saddle, and taken a steadying pull at the brown mare. Even Lauzanne seemed lifted out of his usual lethargy, and, wide-mouthed, was pulling Allis out of the saddle.

"Curse the brute!" gasped Porter, burying his knees in the saddle flaps, and searching for the dangling stirrup with the toe of his right foot. Once he almost had it, but missed; the iron, swinging viciously, caught Diablo in the flank—it made little difference, his terror was complete. All the time Porter was kneading the dangling reins back through forefinger and thumb, shortening his hold for a strong pull at the galloping brute's head.

"Who-o-o-a-h, who-o-o-ah, stead-y!" and, bracing himself against the pummel he swung the weight of his shoulders on the reins.

As well might he have pulled at the rock of Gibraltar. Diablo's head was up, his teeth set hard and the man's strength was as nothing against the full-muscled neck of the big horse. Diablo was cutting down the lead the

other two held over him, galloping like a demon. Porter felt that he must loosen the bit and throw that set head down to get command of the horse. One fierce yank to the right and the black head swayed a trifle; another to the left and—God in heaven! the rein snapped, and its loose end came back, slashing the rider across the face. He reeled with the recoil, nearly bringing Diablo to his knees with the sudden swing of weight on the right rein. Porter's brain jerked foolishly for an instant; then he was the trained horseman again, and had let the remaining leather slip through his fingers a trifle.

"Go on!" he shouted to those in front; "go on—give me a lead! Hang to the course!"

He realized now that the crazed brute under him must run himself out. All he could do was to sit tight and wait till Diablo had raced himself to a standstill. To use the one rein meant a crash into the rail, and surely death. Before, he had thought only of the horse's welfare; now it was a matter of his own life. All that remained to him was to keep a cool head, a steady nerve, and wait.

Freed of restraint, not battled with, the Black's stride lengthened, his nostrils spread wider, the hoofs pounded quicker and quicker until the earth echoed with their palpitating beat. The other horses heard the turmoil, and they, too, became more afraid, and took up the mad rush.

Diablo's reaching nose was at Lauzanne's hip when Allis took one swift backward glance. She saw the dangling rein, the set look in her father's face, the devil eyes of the horse, and for one breath-gasp her heart fluttered in its beat. As quickly she put the fear from

her, and swinging Lauzanne a shade wide, left Diablo more room next the rail.

"On, Lauzanne!" she called through drawn lips; and hitched encouragingly in the saddle.

Lucretia was still in front, her speed mocking at the swift rush of Lauzanne and Diablo. But how the Black galloped! Every post saw him creeping up on the Chestnut, and Allis riding and nursing him to keep the runaway hemmed in at the turns, so that he could not crash through the outer rail. No one spoke again. Each knew that nothing was left to do but keep Diablo to the course, and ride, ride.

Just in front of Lauzanne, with swinging stride raced the brown mare, waiting till the Chestnut should drop back beaten, to take up the running with Diablo. That was Carter's good judgment; and he rode as though it were the Derby, and he was nursing his mount for the last call at the finish.

At the three quarters Lauzanne and Diablo were neck and neck; at the half, the Black was lapped on Lucretia; another furlong and she was laboring to keep her place, nose and nose with him.

"I'm done," panted Carter, feeling the mare swerve and falter; "I'm done—God help us!"

Still there was no check in the Black's gallop; he was like a devil that could go on forever and ever.

They had turned into the straight with Lucretia a neck to the bad, when Carter heard the girl's voice faintly calling, "Pull out, Ned!" The boy thought it fancy. Lauzanne the Despised couldn't be there at their heels. He had thought him beaten off long ago. But again the voice came, a little stronger, "Pull out, Ned!"

This time there was no mistake. It might be a

miracle, but it was his duty to obey. As he galloped, Carter edged Lucretia to the right. Without looking back he could feel Lauzanne creeping up between him and Diablo. Soon the Chestnut's head showed past his elbow, and they were both lapped on the Black. Halfway up the stretch Allis was riding stirrup to stirrup with her father. Porter's weight was telling on Diablo.

"She's got him. Lauzanne'll hold him if he doesn't quit," Carter muttered, as he dropped back, for Lucretia was blown.

Past the finish post Lauzanne was a head in front, and Diablo was galloping like a tired horse.

"He's beat!" ejaculated Carter. "Hello! that's it, eh? My word, what a girl!"

He saw Allis reach down for the slack rein running from her father's hand to Diablo's mouth. "Missed! She's got it!" he cried, eagerly. "The devil!"

As Allis grasped Diablo's rein, the horse, with sudden fury at being drawn toward Lauzanne, his old foe, snapped at the Chestnut. As he did so, thrown out of his stride, his forelegs crossed and he went down in a heap with the rider underneath. The force of his gallop carried the Black full over onto his back. He struggled to his feet, and stood, shaking like a leaf, with low-stretched neck and fear-cocked ears, staring at the crushed, silent figure that lay with its face smothered in the soft earth. In a dozen jumps Allis stopped Lauzanne, threw herself from the saddle, and leaving the horse ran swiftly back to her father.

"Oh, my God! he's dead, he's dead!" she cried, piteously, the nerve that had stood the strain of the fierce ride utterly shattered and unstrung at sight of the senseless form.

"He's not dead," said Carter, putting his hand over Porter's heart. "It's just a bad shake-up. Mike's coming, and we'll soon get him home. He'll be all right, Miss Allis—he'll be all right," he kept muttering in a dazed manner, as he raised her father's head to his knee.

"Take Lucretia and gallop for the docthor, Miss Allis," commanded Mike coming up on the run. We'll get yer father home in the buggy."

"In God's mercy, don't let him die, Mike," and bending down she pressed her lips to the cold forehead that was driven full of sand. "Get him home quick, and try not to let mother see. I'll take Lauzanne."

Lauzanne had followed her and was standing waiting; his big eyes full of a curious wonderment. Mike lifted Allis to the saddle. As he drew back his hand he looked at it, then up at the girl. "Don't cry, Miss," he said, struggling a little with his voice that was playing him tricks; "yer father's just stunned a bit. The dochtor'll brace him up all right."

"It's bad business, this," he continued, as Allis galloped on her errand, and he helped Carter lift the injured man. "There, that's roight; jist carry his legs; I'll take him under the back."

As they moved slowly toward the buggy that stood in the paddock, Diablo followed at their heels as though he had done nothing in the world but take a mild gallop. "Ye black divil!" muttered Mike, looking over his shoulder; ye've murthered wan av the best min as iver breathed. If I'd me way, I'd shoot ye. I'd turn ye into cat meat; that's what ye'r fit for!"

"What broke the rein?" he asked of Carter as they neared the buggy; "what started thim goin'?"

"Somebody was in the old stand," Carter replied, as putting his foot on the step he raised himself and the dead weight of the limp man.

"There, steady, Ned. Pull the cushion down in the bottom. Now ye've got it. Bot' t'umbs! it's as good as an ambulance. I'll hold his head in me lap, an' ye drive. Here, Finn," he continued, turning to the boy who had caught and brought up Lucretia, "take the wee filly an' that divil's baste back to the barn; put the busted bridle by till I have a good look at it after. Go on, Ned; slow; that's it, aisy does it. When we get out on the turnpike ye can slip along."

When they had turned into the road he spoke again to Carter, "Ye were sayin', Ned, there was a guy in th' ould stan'."

"Yes," replied Carter; "somebody was toutin' us off. A board broke, an' that frightened the boss's mount."

"I t'ought I see a b'y skinnin' off the track," commented Gaynor. "First I t'ought it was Shandy, but what'd he be doin' there? Did ye see his face, Ned?"

"I was too busy takin' a wrap on Lucretia; she was gettin' a bit out of hand."

When they came to the gate which gave entrance to Ringwood house Mike said to Carter, with rough sympathy in his voice: "Slip in ahead, Ned, and tell the Misses that the boss has had a bit av a spill. Say he's just stunned; no bones broke. Bot' t'umbs! though, I fear he's mashed to a jelly. Ask fer a bottle of brandy till we give him a bracer. Ned!" he called, as Carter slipped from the buggy, "see if ye kin kape the Misses from seein' the boss till the docthor comes. Git hould of the girl Cynthie, an' give her the tip that things is purty bad. Go on now; I'll drive slow wid wan hand."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Mike's kindly precautions were of little avail. Mrs. Porter saw the slow-moving conveyance crawling up the broad drive, and instinctively knew that again something terrible had occurred. That Allis was not there added to her fear.

"He's just bad, ma'am," Carter was saying, as Mike reached the steps. But she didn't hear him; her face was white, and in her eyes was the horror of a great fear, but from her lips came no cry; her silence was more dreadful than if she had called out.

"We'll carry him, ma'am," Mike said, as she came down the steps to the buggy, and clutching the wheel rim swayed unsteadily. "Jest git a bed ready, Misses," Gaynor continued, softly; "git a bed ready, an' he'll be all roight afther a bit. He's just stunned; that's all, just stunned!"

It was curious how the sense of evil had limited each one's vocabulary.

"Let me help," pleaded Mrs. Porter, speaking for the first time.

"We'll carry him, Misses—he's just stunned," repeated Mike, in a dreary monotone, as feeling each step carefully with his toe he and Carter bore the still senseless form into the house. The wife had got one of the battered hands between her own, and was walking with wide, dry, staring eyes close to her husband.

"O John, John! Speak to me. Open your eyes and look at me. You're not dead; O God! you're not dead!" she cried, passionately, breaking down, and a pent-up flood of tears coming to the hot, dry eyes as the two men laid Porter on the bed that Cynthia had made ready.

"There, Misses, don't take on now," pleaded Mike.

"The boss is jest stunned; that's all. I've been that way a dozen toimes meself," he added, by way of assurance. "Where's the brandy? Lift his head, Ned; not so much. See!" he cried, exultantly, as the strong liquor caused the eyelids to quiver; "see, Misses, he's all roight; he's jest stunned; that's all. There's the dochtor now. God bless the little woman! She wasn't long!"

The sound of wheels crunching the gravel, with a sudden stop at the porch, had come to their ears.

"Come out av the room, Ma'am," Mike besought Mrs. Porter; "come out av the room an' lave the docthor bring the boss 'round." He signaled to Cynthia with his eyes for help in this argument.

"Yes, Mrs. Porter," seconded Cynthia, "go out to the porch; Miss Allis and I will remain here with the doctor to get what's needed."

"Ah, a fall, eh," commented Dr. Rathbone, cheerily, coming briskly into the room. Then he caught Mike's eye; it closed deliberately, and the Irishman's head tipped never so slightly toward Mrs. Porter.

"Now 'clear the room,' as they say in court," continued the doctor, with a smile, understanding Mike's signal. "We mustn't have people about to agitate Porter when he comes to his senses. I'll need Cynthia, and perhaps you'd better wait, too, Gaynor. Just take care of your mother, Miss Allis. I'll have your father about in a jiffy."

"He's jest stunned; that's all!" added Mike, with his kindly, parrot-like repetition.

It seemed a million years to the wife that she waited for the doctor's outcoming. Twice she cried in anguish to Allis that she must go in; must see her husband.

"He may die," she pleaded, "and I may never see his eyes again. Oh, let me go, Allis, I'll come back, I will."

"Wait here, mother," commanded the girl. "Doctor Rathbone will tell us if—if—" she could not finish the sentence—could not utter the dread words, but clasping her mother's hands firmly in her own, kept her in the chair. Once Mike came out and said, "He's jest stunned, Ma'am. The docthor says he'll be all roight by an' by."

"He won't die—"

"He's worth a dozen dead men, Ma'am; he's jest stunned; that's all!"

There was another long wait, then Dr. Rathbone appeared.

"Porter will be all right, Madame; it'll take time; it'll take time—and nursing. But you're getting used to that," he added, with a smile, "but—" and he looked fixedly at Allis, "he must have quiet; excitement will do more harm than the fall."

"Tell me the truth, doctor," pleaded Mrs. Porter, struggling to her feet, and placing both hands on his shoulders, "I can stand it—see, I'm brave."

"I've told you the truth, Mrs. Porter," the doctor answered. "There's no fear for your husband's recovery if he has quiet for a few days."

She looked into his eyes. Then crying, "I believe you, doctor; thank God for his mercy!" swayed, and would have fallen heavily but for Mike's ready arm.

"She'll be better after that," said the doctor, addressing Allis. "It has been a hard pull on her nerves. Just bathe her temples, and get her to sleep, if you can. I'll come back soon. Your father is not conscious, or will he be, I'm thinking, for a day or two. He has heavy concussion. Cynthia has full directions what to do."

XVI

AFTER Dr. Rathbone had left Mike and Carter went down to the stables.

"I'll jest have a look at that broke rein," said Gaynor; "that sthrap was strong enough to hang Diablo. If there's not some dirty business in this, I'll eat me hat. T'umbs up! but it *was* a gallop, though. The Black kin move whin he wants to."

"But what do you think of old Lauzanne?" exclaimed Carter. "He just wore Diablo down, hung to him like a bulldog, an' beat him out."

"It was the girl's ridin'; an' Lauzanne was feared, too. He's chicken-hearted; that's what he is. Some day in a race he'll get away in front av his horses, an' beat 'em by the length av a street. He'll be a hun'red to wan, an' nobody'll have a penny on."

When they arrived at the stable Mike headed straight for the harness room. The light was dim, coming from a small, high, two-paned window; but Mike knew where every bridle and saddle should be. He put his hand on Diablo's headgear, and bringing it down carried it through the passage to a stable door where he examined it minutely.

"Jest what I t'ought. Look at that," and he handed it to Carter for inspection. "How do ye size that up, Ned?"

"The rein's been cut near through," replied Carter. "I wonder it held as long as it did."

"A dirty, low-down trick," commented Mike. "I'll hang it back on the peg just now, but don't use it again fer a bit."

As he reentered the saddle room briskly his heel slipped on the plank floor, bringing him down. "I'd take me oath that was a banana peel, if it was on the sidewalk," he exclaimed, after a gymnastic twist that nearly dislocated his neck. "Some of ye fellows is pretty careless wit' hoof grease, I'm thinkin'."

More out of curiosity than anything else he peered down at the cause of his sudden slip. "What the divil is it, onyway?" he muttered, kneeling and lighting a match, which he held close to the spot. "Bot' t'umbs!" he exclaimed, "it's candle grease. Have aither of ye b'ys been in here wit' a candle? It's agin the rules."

"There isn't a candle about the barn, an' you know it, Mike," cried Carter, indignantly.

Mike was prospecting the floor with another light.

"Here's two burnt matches," he continued, picking them up. "An' they were loighted last night, too. See that, they're long, an' that means that they wasn't used for lightin' a pipe or a cigar—jes' fer touchin' off a candle, that's all. I know they was loighted last night," he said, as though to convince himself, "fer they're fresh, an' ain't been tramped on. If they'd been here fer two or three days, roight in front of the door, they'd have the black knocked off 'em wid ye boys' feet. This wan didn't light at all hardly, an' there's a little wool fuzz stickin' to it. Gee! that manes some wan sthruck it on his wool pants. Git the lantern, Ned, p'raps we'll fin' out somethin' more. The light from that high up winder ain't good enough fer trackin' a bear."

When the lantern was brought, Mike continued his detective operations, nose and eyes close to the floor, like a black tracker.

"What's that, Ned?" he asked, pointing his finger at a dark brown spot on the boards.

Carter crouched and scrutinized Mike's find. "Tobacco spit," and he gave a little laugh.

"Roight you are; that's what it is. Now who chaws tobaccie in this stable?" he demanded of Carter, with the air of a cross-examining counsel.

"I don't."

"Does Finn?"

"No; I don't think so."

"Didn't Shandy always have a gob of it in his cheek—the dirty pig?"

"Yes, he did, Mike."

"I t'ought so; I t'ought it was that blackguard. But how did the swine get in here? The stable was locked, an' I had the key in me pocket. I'll take me oath to that."

Carter took his cap off, ran a hand reflectively up and down the crown of his head, canvassing every possible entry there might be to the stalls. Suddenly he replaced his cap and whistled softly. "I know, Mike; he crawled through the dung window. I've seen him do it half a dozen times. When he was too lazy to go for the keys, he'd wiggle through that hole."

Mike said nothing, but led the way to the back of the stable. There he climbed upon the pile of rotting straw, and examined closely the small, square opening, with its board slide, through which Shandy had passed the night before.

"God! I t'ought so!" he ejaculated. "Here's more

tobacco spit, where the cutt'roat divil stood when he opened the winder."

Looking down, his eye caught the glint of something bright deep in the straw. He dug his hand down into the mass and brought up a knife. "Whose is that, Ned?" he queried.

Carter looked at it closely. "Shandy's," he answered; "I'll swear to that. I've borrowed it from him more than once to clean out the horses' hoofs."

"Bot' t'umbs up! I'd hang that b'y to a beam if I had him here. He cut that rein as sure as God made little apples," declared Mike, vehemently. "An' the gall av him to go an' sit there in the ould stand to watch the Black run away wit' somewan an' kill 'em. Now jest kape yer mouth shut, Ned, an' we'll put a halter on this rooster. By hivins! when I git him I'll make him squale, too!"

XVII

THE seriousness of Porter's accident became clearer to Doctor Rathbone the following day. He imparted this information to Allis; told her that in all probability it would be weeks before her father would be strong again.

"In the meantime, little woman, what are you to do with all these hungry horses on your hands?" he asked.

The girl's answer came quickly enough, for she had lain awake through all the dreary night, thinking out this problem. Without medical knowledge she had felt certain that her father was badly injured, and the gloomy future had come to her in the darkness instead of sleep.

"I'll look after them," she answered the doctor, quite simply.

A smile of skepticism hovered about his full lips, as he raised his eyes to the girl's face, but the look of determination, of confidence that he met put his doubts to flight. "I believe you can do it, if any man can," and he put his big hand on her slight shoulders, as much as to say, "I'm behind you; I believe in you."

Of course an inkling of Porter's condition had to be given his wife, though the full gravity was masked. This was done by Allis, and Mrs. Porter immediately became a prey to abject despair.

The first thing to be done was to get rid of Diablo. She was too gentle to ask that he be shot, but he must

go, even if he be given away. She would willingly have sacrificed all the horses. Always with their presence had come financial troubles, spiritual troubles; now the lives of those dear to her were in actual peril. No wonder the good woman was rendered hysterical by the strong emotions that swayed her.

In her depression she somewhat startled Allis by insisting that they must send for Mr. Crane at once. After all, it was not so unreasonable; with the master of Ringwood helpless, who else could they consult with over their entangled condition? For the past year Porter had found it necessary to keep in constant touch with the bank; so they must become familiar with the details of the entanglement.

Mrs. Porter had come to have the utmost confidence in Crane's friendship and ability; he was the one above all others to have Diablo taken off their hands. So Philip Crane, to his intense delight, was summoned to Ringwood. This was his first knowledge of Porter's mishap, for he had been in New York.

Crane was supposed to possess a rare magnetism; most certainly men came under his influence with a noiseless, cheerful complaisance. It may have been that there was a slight fascination in the oblique contour of his eyes, but in reality his power lay in his exquisite finesse; people delved for him under the impression that they were laboring according to the dictates of their own sweet wills. Figuratively speaking, he twisted Mrs. Porter round his finger, and so delightfully, that she was filled with gratitude because of Crane's kindness in their hour of trouble.

The matter of Diablo was settled in a minute; he would buy the horse himself, and the price could be

arranged when Mrs. Porter was able to discuss the matter—that is, definitely; in the meantime he would pay a thousand for him. He understood Porter had bought him for that price. With a touch of kindly humor, Crane declared that he would have a small bet on the horse for Allis the first time he started.

Beyond parting with Diablo, Allis would not go farther in the matter of selling the horses; this was the full extent of her concession to the mother. Had she known that her father had entered Diablo in the Brooklyn Handicap she might even have refused to part with the horse. As it happened, Porter had entered both Lucretia and Diablo in the Brooklyn a day or so before his accident, but had not spoken of it.

Crane assured Mrs. Porter that she need not distract her mind over money matters, the bank could easily carry their load until her husband was himself again. No matter how things turned out, it was a delicate matter to touch upon, the possibility of Porter's condition taking a serious turn, but coming from Crane it seemed like an earnest of his sincerity—well, Mrs. Porter would find a friend in him, quite willing and able to smooth their difficult path.

Crane had meant to defer any protestations of regard for Allis until a propitious future, but with his quick perception he saw that the psychological moment had been moved forward by the sudden effacement of the master of Ringwood. If he spoke now to Mrs. Porter it would give her a right to call upon his services. He would appear in the light of a debtor; it would break down barriers which might seem to exist because of their non-relationship.

Crane had not been without a suspicion that the

younger man, Mortimer, might prove a rival; heroics such as the Diablo episode were apt to give young people a romantic interest in each other; Fate had more than evened matters up by giving him the present opportunity. He thought with some satisfaction how perfectly helpless Mortimer was in the present instance, for he was most undeniably poor. It was an opportunity to be grasped; and Crane never let the tide pass its flood in the waters of his life.

So the banker spoke to Mrs. Porter of his strong love for Allis; so delicately, and with so much sincerity, that she was completely won over. It is true, the ground had been prepared for the seed, for the mother had long feared that Allis might become attached to some one of Porter's racing associates. Though strong in spiritual matters, the good woman was not without worldly instinct. She was pleased with Crane personally; he was not by any means a racing man; a rich banker, who would make a most desirable husband for her daughter. Of course, it would rest with the girl herself. Mrs. Porter would not coerce nor influence her; but why should not Allis come to care for Crane under the influence of his strong love?

Mrs. Porter's mind had rebounded from its dazed condition after her husband's accident, and was now acute. All these thoughts came to her with rapidity, as Crane talked with masterly judgment.

To the mother's suggestion that he speak to Allis he put forward a plea of delicate consideration for the girl; he would rather deny himself; he would wait patiently until her mind was in a happier condition. Cleverly enough he knew that Mrs. Porter was now his ally, and would plead his cause with less chance of

failure than if he startled Allis by the sudden fronting of life's great problem.

When Crane had gone Allis found her mother calmed by his visit; his assurances had driven away distressing clouds of financial worry.

Almost immediately Mrs. Porter transmitted to the girl what had come to her of Crane's declaration.

"It seems almost like an answer to my prayer," she said to Allis; "not, of course"—she interrupted herself —"that I've been praying for a husband for you, but this wicked racing has warped the whole woof of my life; it seemed inevitable in the strength of its contaminating atmosphere that you would be wedded into it, though one were better dead than willingly choose a path of sin."

"Then you've settled it, mother!" Allis's big eyes took on a dangerous look of rebellion.

"No, daughter; you must choose for yourself; only you will be wise not to go contrary to your parent's wishes. I did—"

"But you are not sorry, mother?" there was reproach in the girl's voice.

"Not for having wedded your father, but because of his racing life. I should have been firmer, and asked him to give it up before I married him. He might have done it then. Mr. Crane is a gentleman, Allis. That is a great deal nowadays, and he loves you most sincerely. Words often mean very little, but one can tell—at least when they've come to years of discretion they can—from a man's voice whether he is in earnest or not. I suppose it is very worldly to speak of his riches, but in poverty one can do very little, very little good. I had rather that you didn't have to look with misgiving

into the future, Allis; it has taken much joy out of my existence. The dread of poverty is a nightmare; it wears one's life threadbare. To the young, buoyed up by confidence in the rosy future, this may seem sordid, but this feeling of insecurity mars many lives which might otherwise be happy.

"You see, Allis," her mother continued, "I know you are heart-whole, so I can't cause you any misery by my well-meant advice. You've been a good girl, and there has been nobody of your class about. Mr. Mortimer is, I dare say, a gentleman, and I must confess I was afraid that you might mistake a feeling of generosity to him for something stronger; but that was only an idle fancy, I see. It would have been unfortunate if it were otherwise, for he is very poor indeed. His small salary must be all taken up in keeping himself, his widowed mother, and a younger sister."

Allis gave a sudden start. She had not known these particulars of Mortimer's life; but they carried certain explanations of his conduct. Quite casually she had formed an impression that he was penurious; something he had dropped about not being able to afford certain pleasures. That was where the money went—to support his mother and sister. Unwittingly her mother was pleading the cause of two men.

The mother's talk depressed Allis greatly. Why should this troublesome matter come to her when she had so much to bear, so much to do. It gave her quite a shock to find that as her mother talked she was not thinking of Crane at all. She could not picture his face, even; just the narrow-lidded eyes peeped at her in her thoughts once or twice; it would be horrible to look into them forever and ever. The face of Mortimer,

pale and firm-set as it had been in that day of strife, was always obliterating the other visage. Was her mother right? Was she so heart-whole?

As if her thoughts had bearing on her mother's mind, the latter said: "I wouldn't have spoken to you of this matter while your father is so ill if it weren't for the fact that our position is very precarious. I can't understand just how badly off we are, but if anything were to happen your father, I hardly know what would become of us."

"And Mr. Crane has promised to help us if—if—" There was a hard ring in the girl's voice as she spoke, getting not past the "if," refusing to put into words the distressing thought.

"There is no 'if' about it, daughter. Mr. Crane is our friend, your father's friend, and he is going to help us; and he only spoke of his regard for you by way of an excuse—it was delicacy on his part, thinking that I would have less compunction in accepting his good offices. All I ask, girl, is that you will try to like Mr. Crane; if you can't, well, you won't find me making you unhappy. But I can tell you this, Allis, unless matters mend, and how the change is to come I can't say, your father will lose Ringwood and it will belong to Mr. Crane. Even if the horses were sold off, the money would not clear the debts; besides, I think that even the horses are encumbered."

Allis stood in indecision for a little, thinking deeply; then she went up to her mother, and, taking her face in her hands, kissed her.

"I understand, mother," she said, "you are worrying over the dear old place, over my future, and over father, and it is nothing but worry, worry, worry all the time.

But I'll save Ringwood for you, mother. I hope father will soon be well again and that luck will change; but anyway, mother, I promise you that no matter what effort it costs me you sha'n't sacrifice the dear old place."

Mrs. Porter's eyes were wet with tears of gratitude. She was thinking only of the redemption of the place through Crane; but Allis's words had meant far more than she had taken from them. They were inspired by a faith that she could save their fortunes without sacrificing herself to Crane. If not, if she failed, she was brave, she was a Porter, and would keep her word and save Ringwood, even at that price.

XVIII

JOURNEYING back to New York, Crane reviewed in detail his interview with Mrs. Porter. He congratulated himself upon his wisdom in having instituted his love suit by proxy. With all his masterfulness he was very considerably in awe of Miss Allis. There was a not-to-be-daunted expression in her extraordinary eyes which made him feel that a love tilt with her would be a somewhat serious business. He pictured himself as an ardent lover; he would cut a droll figure in that role, he knew; emotions were hardly in his line. He might feel such an assertive emotion as love quite as strongly as anyone, in fact, did, but could he express himself with faultless consistency? He rather doubted it. His usual slow-advancing method was certainly ordained of this intricate endeavor; and he had made great progress with the mother, the one above all others to be placated; adversity, continuous as it promised to be, would probably settle Porter's influence in his favor. His plan of action plainly was to be often at Ringwood to familiarize the household with his presence. The acquiring of Diablo would facilitate that.

Diablo—a skate! He laughed to himself over his purchase. Certainly Langdon would laugh at him, too; not openly, of course; Crane wouldn't tolerate that. What an influence this girl had over him, to be sure! Any man who had endeavored to sell him a bad horse would have had a hopeless task; with but a nod of

encouragement from Allis he would have bought every horse—all the useless crooks they had; the stable was full of them, Lauzanne among the rest.

The influence was dividing his nature into a dual one; starting into life infantile thoughts of a generous morality; an unrest of great vigor was coming to him, retribution; possibly the power to feel the difference between an avariciousness, fathering dishonesty, and this new recognition of other rights.

On his arrival in New York he sent for his trainer.

"I bought a horse at Ringwood. I want you to look after him, Langdon," he said. "Their man, Gaynor, will send him direct to your stables."

The Trainer's face brightened. "Did you get Lucretia after all?"

"No; I bought a big black, Diablo."

The look of delight faded from Langdon's eyes quickly. "The devil!" he exclaimed.

"That's what I said; that's his name."

"But he's the most uncertain brute that ever wore a set of plates. You'll get no good of him, sir; he's bad, clean through. It's come down to him from his second sire, Robert the Devil, without a bit of the good, either. He'd break a man that would follow him."

"He won't break me," answered Crane, quietly; "nor you, either, Langdon—you've got too much sense."

This subtle tribute mollified the Trainer.

Crane proceeded: "I remember the horse quite well. Four thousand was paid for him as a yearling; as a two-year-old he was tried out good enough to win the Futurity; but when it came to racing he cut it and finished in the ruck."

"That's right," commented Langdon. "He owes me

a good bit, that same Johnny; his people thought him a lead-pipe cinch, and I went down the line on him to my sorrow."

"Just so. You know him as well as I do. It's a great way to get acquainted with them, isn't it, Langdon; put your money on, and have the good thing go down?"

Langdon had the highest possible opinion of his master's astuteness and began to waver in his antipathy to Diablo.

"You think he's really good, then, sir; did he show you a fast trial?"

"I didn't even see the horse," Crane answered, looking dreamily out of the window. "I bought him to—"

He paused in reflection; he couldn't tell Langdon why he had bought him, and he hardly cared to have his prestige with the Trainer destroyed. He continued, shifting the subject-matter a trifle, "You did John Porter up over Lauzanne last summer, Langdon—"

"Me?" questioned the Trainer. Was Crane forgetting his share in the matter?

"Yes, you!" affirmed the other, looking him steadily in the eye. "You sold him Lauzanne, and Lauzanne was loaded."

Langdon said nothing. What the devil was coming?

"Well," drawled Crane, "Porter's badly hurt; he's out of the race for some time to come. They're friends of mine—"

"They're friends," mused Langdon; "who in thunder are *they*?"

"They're friends of mine, and I offered to buy Lauzanne back, just to help them out; but the old man's

daughter has got the Chestnut for a hack, and she won't sell him. It was Diablo's fault that Porter got the fall, so they were willing to part with him, and I took the brute."

This was certainly a new role for Crane to play, Langdon thought; his employer helping people out when they were in difficulties was a revelation. The Trainer felt inclined to laugh. No doubt there was something back of it all; some tout must have given Crane information of a fast gallop Diablo had done, and he had gone to Ringwood to buy the horse, thinking that Porter would be selling some of his racers owing to the accident.

Langdon tried to remember what Shandy had said about Diablo, or whether the boy had mentioned his name at all.

"I wonder what condition he's in?" the Trainer remarked, questioningly.

"Physically I think he's all right; it seems he galloped something under forty miles with Porter before he came a cropper. But I understand they had an imp of a boy, Sheedy, or Shaney—"

"Shandy," corrected Langdon.

"Yes, that's the name," affirmed Crane, drawing a semicircle in the air with his cigar, "and he's a devil on wheels, by all accounts. Diablo's no angel, as you've said, Langdon, and this boy made him a heap worse. You've handled some bad horses in your time, and know more about it than I do; but I'd suggest that you put Westley—he's a patient lad—to look after the Black; give him quite a bit of work, and when you've got him right, try him out with something, and if he shows any form we'll pick out a soft spot for him. Let

me see, he's a maiden—fancy that, buying a four-year-old maiden!"

Langdon laughed approvingly. Crane was evidently coming back to his view of the case.

"Well, as I've said, he's a maiden, and we'll try and graduate him out of that class. It will be a great chance for a killing if we can round him into his early two-year-old form; and *you* can do it, Langdon, if anybody on earth can."

"Now I've got him on his reputation," thought Crane, idly brushing specks of cigar ash from the front of his coat.

"Just as I thought," mused Langdon; "the old man's got a horse after his own heart. Everybody thinks Diablo's no good, but the boss has found out something, and is on for the biggest kind of a *coup*."

"How's The Dutchman coming on?" asked Crane, intimating by the question that the subject of Diablo had been closed out, for the present, at least.

"Great. He cleans up his four quarts three times a day, and is as big as a cart horse. I never had a better doer in my hands. If he keeps well, and I think he will, you have a great chance with him for the Brooklyn Derby."

"That's encouraging. There are some good horses in it, though, White Moth and others. However, I'll back The Dutchman to win fifty thousand, and there'll be ten thousand in that for you, Langdon, if it comes off." The Trainer's mouth watered. Money was his god. Horses were all right as a means to an end, but the end itself was gold. He would stop at nothing to attain that end; his avaricious mind, stimulated by Crane's promise, came at once to the disturbing element in the

pleasant prospect, Shandy's report of Lucretia's good form.

"Did you find out anything about Porter's mare Lucretia? I know White Moth's form; both fit and well. The Dutchman holds him safe over the Derby journey."

"No; I didn't hear anything about Porter's mare."

"I have," said Langdon, decisively. "I paid a boy to keep an eye on her, and he says she'll be hard to beat."

Crane frowned. "What boy?" he asked, abruptly.

"Shandy."

"Well, just drop that; chuck that game. John Porter has his own troubles. If he can win, let him. He can't if The Dutchman keeps well; but anyway, our own horses will keep us fully occupied."

Langdon was dumbfounded. If Crane had opened the Bible and read a chapter from St. Luke he would not have been more astonished. It had occurred to him that he had done a remarkably smart thing; he had expected commendation for his adroitness in looking after his master's interests. This disapprobation of such a trivial matter as the touting off of an opponent's horses was another new discovery in his master's character. Where were they at, anyway? Presently Crane would be asking him to give the public a fair run for their money each time out.

All at once a light dawned upon Langdon. Crane was doubling on him. He saw it like a flash. His employer had a tout on the ground himself; that was how he had got next some good performance of Diablo's. My, but it was clever; he could appreciate it. Crane rose in his estimation again.

Quite humbly he answered: "Very well; it's not my

funeral; I'll bring The Dutchman to the post fit to run the race of his life. If Lucretia beats him it won't be my fault. I thought perhaps you might want to hedge a bit on Porter's mare."

"I don't think it. I'll stand The Dutchman; there are too many in to start backing them all. Let me know if the Black gives you any encouragement, and I'll see about placing him."

After Langdon had gone Crane lighted a fresh cigar and let his thoughts circle about Allis and Diablo. It would be just like the play of Fate for the horse to turn out good, now that John Porter had got rid of him. When evil fortune set its hard face against a man he could do little toward making the wicked god smile, and Porter, even when he was about, was a poor hand at compelling success.

. . . . . .

Jakey Faust learned of Diablo's transition from Porter's to Langdon's stable. This information caused him little interest at first; indeed, he marveled somewhat at two such clever men as Crane and Langdon acquiring a horse of Diablo's caliber.

Faust's business relationship with Crane was to a certain degree tentative. Crane never confided utterly in anybody; if agents obeyed his behests, well and good; and each transaction was always completed in itself. He had discovered Faust and used him when it suited his purpose.

Some time after the purchase of Diablo, Jakey, reading his *Morning Telegraph,* came with much interest upon the entries for the Brooklyn Handicap, published that day. They were all the old campaigning Handicap horses, as familiar to Faust as his fellow members

of the betting ring. As his eye ran down the long list a sudden little pig grunt of surprise bubbled up through his fat throat. "Gee, Diablo! Oh, ho, Mr. Crane!"

He tore out the list and put it in his pocket; then he sat for a time, thinking. The result was a run down to Gravesend to pay just a friendly visit to Langdon.

As far as Crane was concerned, the Trainer and the Bookmaker were like two burglars suddenly coming upon each other while robbing the same house; they were somewhat in a condition of armed neutrality toward each other.

Faust hoped that Langdon would talk about Diablo; but the Trainer was like most of his guild generally, a close-mouthed man, so Jakey had to make his own running.

"What's the boss goin' to do with Diablo?" he asked Langdon.

"Must 've bought him for a work horse, I guess," the Trainer answered.

"Is he any good?"

"He can eat; that's all I see from him yet."

"What did he buy him for?"

"To help a snoozer that was sittin' in bad luck."

Faust had an odd habit of causing his fat sides to ripple like troubled water when he wished to convey the impression that he was amused; he never laughed, just the rib ripple.

"What's funny?" Langdon asked, eying Jakey, with querulous disfavor.

"Crane buying a horse to help a man," answered the Cherub, wondering if Langdon was so devoid of humor as to take it seriously.

"Crane told me so himself," said the Trainer; "Porter's hurt, an' I guess they're in a hole, an' the boss took over Diablo."

"Say, Dick," and Faust edged close enough to tap the other man's ribs with his thumb, "were you born yesterday? I say," continued the Cherub, for Langdon had turned away somewhat impatiently, "what's the good av givin' me that gup; you didn't stand for it yourself—not on yer life. Th' old man's pretty slick; buys a bad horse to help a poor mutt, an' enters him in the Brooklyn, eh?"

"The Brooklyn!" exclaimed Langdon, thrown off his guard.

With corpulent intensity the Cherub melodramatically drew from his pocket the *Telegraph* clipping and tendered it to Langdon, watching the latter's face closely. "That's the pea, Dick, eh?" he asked.

Langdon was thinking. Was Crane doubling on him all around? Why the devil hadn't he told him?

"Now you ain't takin' in that fairy tale of Crane's any more'n I am, Dick. Why can't we do a bit for ourselves over this; it won't hurt the boss none. Won't throw him down. This horse was a good youngster, an' Crane didn't get him without seein' him do somethin'. You jest keep me posted, an' if he shapes good I can back 'm fer an old-time killin', see? I'll divvy up straight."

Langdon didn't answer at once—not with satisfaction to Faust; he knew that Crane held the butter for his bread, even the bread itself; but here was a man with cake, and he loved cake. Finally, in the glamour of Jakey's talk of untold wealth to be acquired, Langdon, swayed by the cupidity of his nature rather than

his better judgment, promised half-heartedly to co-operate with Faust.

But no sooner had the latter gone than the lode-star of Langdon's self-interest flickered clearly in view, and he promised Mr. Jakey, mentally, a long trip to a very hot place, indeed, rather than a surreptitious partnership over Diablo.

It was some little time after this, while Faust was feeling somewhat irritated at the absence of information from Langdon, that he had an interview with Crane.

"I want you to back The Dutchman to win fifty thousand for me over the Brooklyn Derby," the latter said.

"But there's no winner book on it," objected Faust.

"That's just where your cleverness will come in," suavely answered Crane. "There's no hurry, and there are always people looking for foolish money. There's one such in Chicago, O'Leary; and I fancy they could even be found in New York. But you ought to get fifty to one, about it, if you put it on easy."

"I see you have Diablo entered for the Brooklyn," Faust put out as a feeler. "Don't you want a commission worked on him?"

"I didn't enter him; that was somebody else's foolishness, and I don't want to back him."

"He's a hundred to one."

"A thousand would be short odds, I should say," answered Crane. "But wait a bit. I bought him just to—well, I took him from some people who were tired of his cannibal ways, and promised to have a small bet on him the first time he ran, for—for the man." The equivocation was really a touch of delicacy. "You

might take the odds to fifty for me; there's not one chance in a million of his starting, but I might forget all about this little matter of the bet, even if I were foolish enough to pay post-money on him."

"Hadn't I better dribble on more from time to time, if he has a chance?"

"Not of my money, thanks!" The "thanks" clipped like a steel trap, and the business was completed.

Faust went away more than ever suspicious of Crane and Diablo. That fifty dollars being put on for anybody else was bunkum. What was Crane up to anyway? If he really meant to back the horse he would not have started with such a trifle. Perhaps Diablo had been stuck in the Brooklyn simply to see how the handicapper would rate him.

Faust was convinced that Crane had some big *coup* in view; he would wait a little, and at the first move have a strong play himself.

XIX

LANGDON was a consummate trainer, a student of horse character. He knew that while biniodide of mercury would blister and put right a bowed tendon, or the firing iron take the life out of a splint, that a much finer knowledge than this was requisite to get full-hearted work out of a thoroughbred. Brain must be pitted against brain; so he studied his horses; and when Diablo came into his hands, possessed of a mind disease, he worked over him with considerable intelligent patience.

This study of horse character was the very thing that had caused him to go wrong over Lauzanne. He had not gone quite far enough; had not waited for time to demonstrate clearly the horse's temperament, but had recourse to a cocaine stimulant. But with him Lauzanne's case had been exceptional.

At first there was little encouragement over Diablo, but almost by accident Langdon discovered that the Black's bad temper was always fanned into a blaze by the sight of the boy Shandy.

Then came a glint of hope. Diablo took a fancy to Westley, the jockey, who was experimentally put on his back in the working gallop. After that Shandy was kept out of the way; Westley took Diablo under his care, and the big horse began to show a surprising improvement.

Crane had been quite honest in his statement that he thought Diablo a bad horse. His having been entered by Porter in the "Brooklyn" suggested the possi-

bility that his former owner must have seen some merit in the horse. At any rate, he advised Langdon to give Diablo a patient trial. He really had very little idea that the horse would start in the Handicap—it seemed improbable. Langdon was also convinced that Porter had discovered something great in Diablo; that Crane knew this, and had paid a stiff price for the horse, and to his own ends was keeping it dark.

As the winter turned into April he intimated to Crane that it was time for them to decide the placing of the horses, and suggested that they try them out. Crane had already decided to race The Dutchman this year in his own name and not in Langdon's. If The Dutchman came up to expectation they could give him a slow preparation up to Derby time; they could find out whether Diablo was worth keeping for—well, for Morris Park or Gravesend, or they could hurry him on a little, and start him at Aqueduct.

Crane agreed with this reasoning, and it was decided to give the two horses a home trial.

On the day that Langdon had said he would try Diablo and The Dutchman, Crane went down to Gravesend. When he got to the Trainer's house he found the latter waiting for him.

"I sent the horses over with the boys," Langdon said; "if you'll just wait a minute, I'll have a buggy hitched up and we'll drive over."

A stable-boy brought the trap to the door in a few minutes, and Langdon, telling Crane to get in, disappeared into the house, returning presently with two saddles, which he placed in the buggy.

"A couple of favorite saddles of mine," he explained, "they're like old fiddles that great players carry about

under their arms an' sleep with, an' never let no one but themselves touch."

"Are you that particular with these?" asked Crane by way of conversation, not feeling at all interested in what he considered a fad of the Trainer's.

"Yes; I mostly handle 'em myself. They cost a bit. I had 'em made to order. The boys is that careless, they'd smash anything."

As they jogged along, Langdon kept up a monologue dissertation on the merits of the two horses. "It's a good day for a gallop," and he flicked the driving beast's quarter with the whip; "there's not much wind, an' the air's a bit sharp. They'll be on their mettle, the both of 'em, more 'specially Diablo. I had his plates changed. 'Pears to me he hadn't been shod in three moons; I'll bet the smith took an inch off his toes." Then he broke off to chuckle awhile.

Crane was not skilled in the anatomy of a horse, beyond as it worked out in winning races and money. That a horse had toes had never quite come into his knowledge, and Langdon's gurgle of mirth he put down to a suspicion that the Trainer was taking a rise out of him in what he had said.

"I was thinking of Paddy Caramagh when he shod Diablo the other day. I think you've heard Pat swear. He holds the belt for cussin' in this part of the country. Well, he let it all out of him before he'd finished with the Black. Ha, ha, ha, ha! I can hear him still, with the sweat running off his face like oats spilling from a feed bag. I says to Paddy, 'Rub his nose a bit,' for I could see it was more nervousness with the horse than sheer deviltry. 'With what?' says Paddy, 'the hammer? Be gor! You're right, though,' says he, and with that

he tries to put a twister on Diablo's nose. Holy mother! Diablo reached for him, and lifted the shirt clean off his back. Say, there was a scared Irishman, if you ever saw one in your life. He threw down the plate, cussin' as only Paddy can, and swore the brute could run till he'd wore his hoofs off, for all of him. Well, I takes hold of the Black's head, an' kids him a bit, only firm-like, and we shod him right enough."

"He is bad tempered, then?" asked Crane.

"No; just wants a fair deal; that's all. You make him believe you're on the square, an' he'll do what's right. But he hasn't got no use for any of the guys that gets a cranky play in on him; he won't stand it. I'm going to put Westley up on him to-day."

"What about The Dutchman?"

"Colley'll do. Any kid can ride him, if they sit still. He's just the easiest-tempered horse ever looked through a bridle; he knows what's doin' all the time. But Colley ain't no good on Diablo, an' if he can smell Shandy, that settles it—it's all over. I'll put Westley up; it takes a man to ride that horse."

"What about this gallop?" asked Crane; "there'll be spies about trying to find out things, won't there?"

"Bet yer life, there'll be somebody, sir. It's just like when I was out in Colorado; you couldn't see a vulture if you traveled forty days, perhaps, but plant a dead thing anywhere and in an hour the sky simply rained 'em down. These touts is most like vultures of anything I know; you've just got to work your stunt to give 'em the go-by, that's all."

Crane took but an apathetic interest in the matters that held full sway over the Trainer's mind; looking after these incidents was Langdon's part of the contract.

That was why they were so strong together. Langdon *could* do it. Just how the trial was to benefit them alone, with the inevitable tout at hand, Crane knew not, neither did he investigate; that was up to the Trainer.

They drove into the paddock. Westley, Colley, and the two stable lads were there.

"Shall we bring out the horses?" asked Westley, as Langdon sat swinging a leg loosely over the end of the buggy seat.

"Any of the talent about, Bill?"

"Quite likely, though I haven't seen none."

"Well, we'll slip 'em now. Just saddle up careless like, and no preliminary, mind you. The sharks won't look for a brush till you've gone around once. Take your mounts down the stretch to the quarter post, an' then come away the first break; if there's anyone toutin' you off, they'll think it just a pipe opener, an' won't catch the time. Run out the mile-an'-a-quarter, make a race of it, but don't go to the bat. Diablo an' The Dutchman don't need no whip to give us about the best they've got."

"All right, sir," answered Westley. "If I'm a judge, when the Black's through pullin', he's done racin', 'cause he's a keen one, so there won't be no call to put the bud to him. If any of the rail birds is lookin' they'll think we're goin' under a strong wrap, even when we're all out."

Langdon nodded his head. He was a man not given to exuberant appreciation. The boys averred that when Dick Langdon didn't curse at them they had done pretty well, indeed.

"What's your weight?" he asked of Westley, abruptly.

"I've just tipped the scales at a hundred-and-three in my sweater."

"One hundred and three," mused the Trainer, making a mental calculation. "What's Colley's weight?"

"He's as near a hundred as you can make it."

"Did you bring over a saddle?"

"Yes; two of 'em; one apiece for the horses."

"Tell Colley to take one, and some leads, and weigh out a hundred and twelve. That'll be three pounds above the scale for May, weight for age, for the three-year-old, The Dutchman. I guess he won't need more'n seven pounds dead weight, for it's a five-pound saddle, I think. Let me see, you said a hundred and three, you were."

"Yes, sir; in the sweater; I can take that off—"

"No; never mind. Take this saddle," and he lifted one from the buggy; "it'll just suit Diablo; he's got a herring-bone of a wither, an' this is high in the tree, an' won't cut him. Here's the cloth an' some leads; weigh out a hundred and twelve, too. Weight for age—Diablo's a four-year-old; you ought to carry a hundred and twenty-six, but he's not The Dutchman's class, an' the youngster'd lose him before they'd gone half the journey. We'll run 'em at level weights, an' he'll get closer to The Dutchman, an' the sharks won't have such a fairy tale to tell about our horse."

"A hundred and twelve, you said, sir?" queried Westley, as he put the saddle that Langdon handed him over his left arm, slipped the thin sheets of lead in his pocket, and stood dangling the linen weight cloth in his right hand.

"Yes; level weights—a hundred an' twelve pounds."

"Westley," the Trainer called as the little man

started off, "just bring the saddle back to me here when you've weighed. I'll put it on Diablo myself; he's a touchy cuss, and I don't want him ruffled by careless handlin'."

"You take considerable trouble over it," remarked Crane. "One would think it was a big handicap you meant to capture this morning."

Langdon started visibly. Was Crane thinking of the Brooklyn? Did this quiet, clever man sitting at his elbow already know as much as he hoped to discover in his present gallop?

He answered: "Handicaps is usually won pretty much like this; they're generally settled before the horse goes to the post for the trip itself. When he goes through the paddock gate the day of the big race he's out of his trainer's hands; the man's got no more to do with the race himself than a kid sittin' up in the grand stand. Here's where I come in, if we mean to land the Brooklyn," and he looked searchingly at Crane, a misleading grin on his lips. But the latter simply joined in the laugh, doubtingly, perhaps.

"A hundred and twelve, neat," declared Westley, as he returned, throwing some loose leads into the buggy. "Colley's gone to saddle The Dutchman."

"All right," answered Langdon, getting down from the seat and taking the saddle. "Go and tell the boy to bring Diablo out of the stall. I'll saddle him in the open. He generally kicks the boards when I cinch him up, an' it puts him in a bad humor."

Langdon started off with the jockey, but turned back, saying, "Oh, Mr. Crane, I wanted to ask you—"

By this he had reached the buggy, while Westley continued on his way to the stalls.

"It's a fine day, sir," continued Langdon, finishing his sentence, and exchanging the saddle held in his hand for the one that was in the buggy.

"Going to put the other on?" asked Crane.

"Yes; I fancy Diablo will like this better. Touchy brutes, these race horses; got to humor 'em. Come on over to the stalls—the horse'll stand."

Diablo was being led around in a small circle by his boy. He was a magnificent creature, sixteen and a half hands high, and built on the same grand scale; perhaps a bit leggy for the huge barrel that topped the limbs; that was what caused him to go wrong in his younger days. His black skin glistened in the noonday sun.

"That's what I call the mirror of health," said Langdon, in an unwonted burst of poetic eloquence, as he passed his hand across the horse's ribs. Then feeling that somehow he had laid himself open to a suspicion of gentleness, added, "He's a hell of a fine looker; if he could gallop up to his looks he'd make some of the cracks take a back seat."

Even Diablo had resented either the mellifluous comparison or the rub of Langdon's hand, for he lashed out furiously, with a great far-reaching leg that nearly caught Crane unawares.

"Your polite language seems to be as irritating to him as the blacksmith's oaths," ejaculated Crane, as he came back from the hasty retreat he had beaten.

"It's only play. Good horses is of two kinds when you're saddlin' 'em. The Dutchman there'll hang his head down, and champ at the bit, even if you bury the girt' an inch deep in his belly; he's honest, and knows it's all needed. That's one kind; and they're generally the same at the post, always there or thereabouts, wait-

in' for the word 'go.' An' they race pretty much the same all the time. If you time 'em a mile in 1:40 at home, they'll do it when the colors is up, an' the silk a-flappin' all about 'em in the race.

"Whoa! Hold still, you brute! Steady, steady! Whoa!" This to Diablo, for while talking he had adjusted the weight cloth with the gentleness of a cavalier putting a silk wrap about his lady love's neck, and had put a fold of soft woolen cloth over the high-boned wither.

"Stand out in front of him and hold his head down a bit;" this to the boy. Then as he slipped the saddle into place and reached underneath for the girths, he continued his address to Crane on the peculiarity of racers.

"Now this is a horse of another color, this one; he ain't takin' things easy at no stage of the game. He objects to everything, an' some day that'll land him a winner, see? He'll get it into his head that the other horses want to beat him out, an' he'll show 'em a clean pair of heels; come home on the bit, pullin' double.

"Whoa, boy! Steady, steady, old man!" Then he ceased talking, for he had taken the girth strap between his teeth, and was cinching up the big Black with the firm pull of a grizzly. Diablo squirmed under the torture of the tightening web on his sensitive skin, and crouched as though he would fall on the Trainer.

"Yes, sir;" continued Langdon, as he ran the stirrups up under the saddle flap out of the way, and motioned to the boy to lead Diablo about. "Yes, sir; this fellow's different. He's too damn sensitive. At the post he's like as not to act like a locoed broncho, an' get one blamed for having 'juiced' him, but he don't need no dope;

what he needs is steadying. If he gets away in front, them long legs of his will take some catchin'. He's the kind that wins when the books are layin' a hundred to one against him. But the worst of it is with his sort, like as not the owner hasn't a penny on them; but the public'll howl; they'll call it in-an'-out runnin'; an' the scribblers'll get their paper to print a notice that the stable ought to be ruled off; an' all the time you're breakin' your heart trying to get him to give his true—Hello! there's Colley out on The Dutchman; mount your horse, Westley—wait, you don't need no spurs; yes, carry a whip, an' give the guys that is watchin' a stage play with it; but don't hit the Black. We'll just see what he'll do himself, this trip," he added, addressing Crane.

Taking Westley's small-booted foot in his hand, he lifted the lad to Diablo's back, and led the horse out through a gate to the course.

XX

THE two boys cantered their mounts down to the quarter post carelessly, as though they were going around to the far side.

"Look at 'em!" cried the Trainer; "isn't he a little gentleman?"

To the uninitiated this might have been taken as a tribute to one of the boys, Westley, perhaps; but the Trainer was not even thinking of them. They were of no moment. It was the wine-red bay, The Dutchman, cantering with gentle, lazy grace, that had drawn forth this encomium. His head, somewhat high carried, was held straight and true in front, and his big eyes searched the course with gentle inquisitiveness, for others of his kind, perhaps.

"He's a lovely horse," commented Crane, knowing quite well to what Langdon referred.

"He's all that, but just look at the other devil."

Diablo was throwing his nose fretfully up and down, up and down; grabbing at the bit; pirouetting from one side the course to the other; nearly pulling Westley over his neck one minute, as with lowered head he sought to break away, and the next dashing forward for a few yards with it stuck foolishly high, like a bad-mouthed Indian cayuse.

"But Westley'll manage him," Langdon confided to Crane, after a period of silent observation; "he'll get his belly full of runnin' when he's gone a mile and a

quarter with The Dutchman. Gad! that was neat; here they come;" for the two boys had whirled with sudden skill at the quarter post, and broke away, with Diablo slightly in the lead. "My God! he can move," muttered Langdon, abstractedly, and quite to himself. The man at his side had floated into oblivion. He saw only a great striding black horse coming wide-mouthed up the stretch. At the Black's heels, with dogged lope, hung the Bay.

"Take him back, take him back, Westley!" yelled Langdon, leaning far out over the rail, as the horses raced by, Diablo well in front.

The Trainer's admonition seemed like a cry to a cyclone, as void of usefulness. What power could the tiny dot lying close hugged far up on the straining black neck have over the galloping fiend?

"Yes, that's the way," Langdon said, nodding his head to Crane, and jerking a thumb out toward the first turn in the course, where the two horses were hugging close to the rail; "that's the way he's worked here."

"Which one?" asked his companion.

"The Black, an' if he ever does that in a race—God help the others—they'll never catch him; they'll never catch him; they'll never catch him," he kept repeating, dwelling lovingly on the thought, as he saw the confirmation of it being enacted before his eyes; for across the new green of the grass-sprouted course he could see two open lengths of daylight between Diablo and The Dutchman.

"Fifty-one and a half for the half-mile," he imparted to Crane, looking at his watch. "Now The Dutchman is moving up; Colley doesn't mean to get left if he

can help it. I'm afraid Diablo'll shut up when he's pinched; his kind are apt to do that. The Dutchman is game, an' if he ever gets to the Black's throat-latch he'll chuck it. But it takes some ridin'; it takes some ridin', sir." He was becoming enthusiastic, exuberant. The silent man at his side noticed the childish repetition with inward amusement. He had thought that Langdon would have been overjoyed to see the bay horse smother his opponent. Was not the Trainer to have ten thousand dollars if The Dutchman won the Handicap? But here he was pinning his satisfaction to the good showing of Diablo. He didn't know of the compact between Langdon and the Bookmaker Faust, but he strongly suspected from the Trainer's demeanor that the gallop he was witnessing foretold some big coup the latter scented.

"He hasn't got him yet, he hasn't got him yet!" cried Langdon, joyfully, as the horses swung around the bottom turn, closer locked, but with Diablo still a short length in the lead.

Crane saw no great cause for exhilaration. The Dutchman was certainly giving the Black twenty pounds the best of it in the weights, for one was a three-year-old while the other was four, and they each carried a hundred and twelve.

"The mile in 1:42," chirped Langdon. "That's movin', if you like, considerin' the track, the condition of the horses, an' that they're runnin' under a double wrap. Now we'll see a ding-dong finish, if the Black doesn't show a streak of yellow. Dutchy's got him," he added, as through his glasses he saw them swing into the straight, neck and neck.

"Clever Mr. Westley!" for Diablo's rider, having the

rail and the lead, had bored out slightly on the turn, so as not to cramp the uncertain horse he rode, and carried The Dutchman wide.

Up the straight they came, the boys helping their mounts with leg and arm; the Black holding his own with a dogged persistence that quite upset Langdon's prognostication of cowardice.

To the watchers it was as exciting as a stake race. The stamina that Langdon had said would stand The Dutchman in good stead over the mile and a half Handicap course now showed itself. First he was level with the Black, then gradually, stride by stride, he drew away from Diablo, and finished a short length in front.

"A great trial," cried the Trainer, gleefully, holding out his watch for Crane's inspection. "See that!" pointing to the hand he had stopped as the Bay's brown nozzle flashed by the post; "two-nine on this course! Anything that beats that pair, fit and well, a mile and a quarter on a fast track'll have to make it in two-five, an' that's the record."

"It looks good business for the Derby, Langdon."

"Yes, it does. That's the first showing I've had from the colt as a three-year-old; but I knew he had it in him. Hanover was a great horse—to my mind we never had his equal in America—but this youngster'll be as good as his daddy ever was. I don't think you ought to start him, sir, till the Derby, if you're set on winnin' it."

He had moved up to the gate as he talked, and now opened it, waiting for the boys to come back. They had eased down the horses gradually after the fierce gallop, turned them about and were trotting toward the paddock, where stood the two men. Langdon took

Diablo by the bridle rein and led him in toward the stalls.

"How did he shape under you, Westley?" he asked, as the boy slipped from the saddle.

"I wouldn't ask to ride a better horse. I thought I had the colt beaten, sure; but my mount seemed to tire a little at the finish. He didn't toss it up, not a bit of it; ran as game as a pebble; he just tired at the finish. I think a mile is his journey. He held The Dutchman safe at a mile."

"I guess you're right, Westley; a mile's his limit. At level weights with the three-year-old, which means that he had twenty pounds the best of it, he should have held his own the whole route to be a stayer, for the colt isn't more'n half ready yet."

"I didn't hustle him none too much, sir; I might a-squeezed a bit more out of him. Did we make fair time?"

"Quite a feeler, Mister Jockey," thought Langdon to himself; "it's news you want, eh?" Then he answered aloud, with a diplomacy born of many years of turf tuition: "Fairish sort of time; it might have been better, perhaps—a shade under two-twelve. I thought they might have bettered that a couple of seconds. But they'll come on—they'll come on, both of them. If anybody asks you, Westley, The Dutchman was beaten off, see? I don't like to discourage the clever owners that has good 'uns in the Derby." Then he added as a sort of after thought, and with wondrous carelessness: "It doesn't matter about the Black, you know; he's only a sellin' plater, so it doesn't matter. But all the same, Westley, when we find a soft spot for him, an over-night sellin' purse or somethin', you'll have the

leg up, with a bet down for you at a long price, see?"

"I understand, sir."

By the time Langdon had slipped the saddle from Diablo's back the boy had thrown a hooded blanket over him, and he was led away.

"Send them home, Westley. Now, Mr. Crane, we'll drive back to the house an' have a bit of lunch."

As they drove along Crane brought up the subject of the trial.

"The colt must be extra good, Langdon, or the Black is—well, as he was represented to be, not much account."

"I guess Diablo's about good enough to win a big handicap, if he happened to be in one at a light weight."

"He didn't win to-day."

"He came pretty near it."

"But where would he have been carrying his proper weight?"

"About where he was, I guess."

"You said as a four-year-old he should have had up a hundred and twenty-six, and he carried a hundred and twelve; and, besides, had the best boy by seven pounds on his back."

"Just pass me that saddle, Mr. Crane," said Langdon, by way of answer. "No; not that—the one I took off Diablo."

Crane reached down his hand, but the saddle didn't come quite as freely as it should have. "What's it caught in?" he asked, fretfully.

"In itself, I reckon—lift it."

"Gad! it's heavy. Did Diablo carry that? What's in it?"

"Lead—built into it; it's my old fiddle, you know. You're the first man that's had his hand on that saddle for some time, I can tell you."

"Then Diablo did carry his full weight," commented Crane, a light breaking in upon him.

"Just about, and carried it like a stake horse, too."

"And you—"

"Yes; I changed the saddles after Westley weighed. He's a good boy, and don't shoot off his mouth much, but all the same things will out while ridin' boys have the power of speech."

"It looks as though Diablo had something in him," said Crane, meditatively.

"He's got the Brooklyn in him. Fancy The Dutchman in at seventy pounds; that's what it comes to. Diablo's got ninety to carry, an' he gave the other twenty pounds to-day. You've got the greatest thing on earth right in your hands now—"

Langdon hesitated for a minute, and then added: "But I guess you knew this all before, or you wouldn't have sent him here."

"I bought him for a bad horse," answered Crane, quietly; "but if he turns out well, that's so much to the good. But it's a bit of luck Porter's not having declared him out to save nearly a hundred. He seems to have raced pretty loose."

"I wonder if he thinks I'm taking in that fairy tale?" thought Langdon. Aloud, he said: "But you'll back him now, sir, won't you? He must be a long price in the winter books."

"Yes; I'll arrange that," answered the other, "and I'll take care of you, too. I suppose Westley will take the mount?"

"Surely."

"Well, you can just give him to understand that he'll be looked after if the horse wins."

"It's the Brooklyn, sir, is it?"

"Seems like it."

"I won't say anything about the race to Westley, though."

"I'll leave all that to you. I'll attend to getting the money on; you do the rest."

When Crane had gone, Langdon paid further mental tribute to his master's astuteness. "Now I see it all," he muttered; "the old man just thought to keep me quiet; throw me off the scent till he duplicated the other trial, whenever they pulled it off. Now he's got a sure line on the Black, an' he'll make such a killin' that the books'll remember him for many a day. But why does he keep throwin' that fairy tale into me about buyin' a bad horse to oblige somebody? A man would be a sucker to believe that of Crane; he's not the sort. But one sure thing, he said he'd look after me, an' he will. He'd break a man quick enough, but when he gives his word it stands. Mr. Jakey Faust can look after himself: I'm not goin' to take chances of losin' a big stable of bread-winners by doublin' on the Boss."

Langdon's mental analysis of Crane's motives was the outcome of considerable experience. The Banker's past life was not compatible with generous dealing. His act of buying Diablo had been prompted by newborn feelings of regard for the Porters, chiefly Allis; but no man, much less Langdon, would have given him credit for other than the most selfish motives.

True to his resolve, Langdon utterly refused to share his confidences with Jakey Faust.

"We've tried the horses," he said, "and the Dutchman won, but Crane knows more about the whole business than I do. You go to him, Jake, or wait till he sends for you, an' you'll find out all about it. My game's to run straight with one man, anyway, an' I'm goin' to do it."

That was all Faust could learn. When an occasion offered he slipped a ten-dollar note into Shandy's hand, for he knew the lad was full open to a bribe, but Shandy knew no more than did the Bookmaker. The Dutchman had won the trial from the Black quite easily, was the extent of his knowledge. As to Diablo himself, Shandy gave him a very bad character indeed.

XXI

FAUST was in a quandary. First Crane had confided in him over Diablo, but now his silence seemed to indicate that he meant to have this good thing all to himself.

Then Langdon had promised to cooperate, now he, too, had closed up like a clam; he was as mute as an oyster.

"Crane is dealin' the cards all the time," thought Faust; "but there's some game on, sure."

He determined to back Diablo for himself at the long odds, and chance it.

Two days later Crane received a very illiterate epistle, evidently from a stable-boy; it was unsigned:

"DERE BOSS, Yous is gittin it in the neck. de big blak hors he didn't carre the sadel you think the blak hors had on his bak. Yous got de duble cros that time. Der bokie hes axin me wot de blak is good fer der bokie is playin fer to trow yous downe.

"No moar at presen."

This was the wholly ambiguous communication that Crane had found under his door. There was no stamp, neither place nor date written in the letter; nothing but an evident warning from some one, who, no doubt, hoped to get into his good graces by putting him on his guard.

As it happened, Crane had just made up his mind to make his plunge on Diablo while the odds were long

enough to make it possible with the outlay of very little capital. He smoked a heavy Manuel Garcia over this new contingency. It did not matter about the saddles. Langdon had confided in him fully. But how had the writer of the ill-spelled missive known of that matter?

Yes, he had better make his bet before these whisperings came to other ears.

But the bookmaker mentioned? That must be Faust. Why was he prowling about among stable lads?

He sent for Faust. When the latter had come, Crane asked Diablo's price for the Brooklyn.

"It's thirty to one now," replied the Bookmaker; "somebody's backin' him."

Faust's small baby eyes were fixed furtively on Crane's pale, sallow face, as he imparted this information; but he might as well have studied the ingrain paper on the wall; its unfigured surface was not more placid, more devoid of indication, than the smooth countenance he was searching.

Crane remained tantalizingly silent for a full minute; evidently his thoughts had drifted away to some other subject.

"Yes," said Faust, speaking again to break the trying quiet, "some one's nibblin' at Diablo in the books. I wonder if it's Porter; did he think him a good horse?"

"It can't be Porter, nor any one else who knows Diablo. It's some foolish outsider, tempted by the long odds. I suppose, however, it doesn't matter; in fact, it's all the better. You took that five thousand to fifty for me, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, just lay it off. You can do so now at a profit."

"You don't want to back Diablo, then? Shall I lay against him further?"

"If you like—in your own book. I don't want to have anything to do with him, one way or the other. I always thought he was a bad horse, and—and—well, never mind, just lay that bet off. I shall probably want to back The Dutchman again shortly."

When Faust had gone, Crane opened the little drawer which held his betting book, took it out, and drew a pencil through the entry he had made opposite Allis's name.

"That's off for a few days, thanks to Mr. Faust," he thought. Then he ran his eye back over several other entries. "Ah, that's the man—Hummel; he'll do."

Next he consulted his telephone book; tracing his finger down the "H" column he came to "Ike Hummel, commission broker, Madison 71184."

Over the 'phone he made an appointment for the next day at eleven o'clock with Hummel; and the result of that interview was that Crane backed Diablo to win him a matter of seventy-five thousand dollars at the liberal odds of seventy-five to one; for Jakey Faust, feeling that he had made a mistake in backing the Black, had laid off all his own bets and sent the horse back in the market to the longer odds. Crane had completely thrown him off his guard.

No sooner had Faust congratulated himself upon having slipped out of his Diablo bets than he heard that a big commission had been most skillfully worked on this outsider for the Brooklyn. In his new dilemma he went to Crane, feeling very much at sea.

"They're backin' your horse again, sir," he said.

"Are they?"

"Yes; heavy."

"If he's worth backing at all I suppose he's worth backing heavily."

This aphorism seemed to merit a new cigar on Crane's part, so he lighted one.

"He's travelin' up and down in the market," continues Faust. "He dropped to thirty, then went back to seventy-five; now he's at twenty; I can't make it out."

"I shouldn't try," advised Crane, soothingly. "Too much knowledge is even as great a danger as a lesser amount sometimes."

Faust started guiltily and looked with quick inquiry at the speaker, but, as usual, there was nothing in his presence beyond the words to hang a conjecture on.

"I thought for your sake that I'd better find out."

"Oh, don't worry about me; that is, too much, you know. I go down to Gravesend once in a while myself, and no doubt know all that's doing."

A great fear fell upon Faust. Evidently this was an intimation to him to keep away from the stables. How did Crane know—who had split on him? Was it Langdon, or Shandy, or Colley? Some one had evidently aroused Crane's suspicion, and this man of a great cleverness had put him away while he worked a big commission through some one else. The thought was none the less bitter to Faust that it was all his own fault; his super-cleverness.

"An' you don't want me to work a commission for you on Diablo?" he asked, desperately.

"No; I sha'n't bet on him at present. And say, Faust, in future when I want you to do any betting on my horses, on my account, you know, I'll tell you.

Understand? You needn't worry, that is—other people. I'll tell you myself."

"I didn't mean—" Faust had started to try a plausible explanation, but Crane stopped him.

"Never mind; the matter is closed out now."

"But, sir," persisted Faust, "if you've got your money all on, can I take a bit now? Is it good business? We've worked together a good deal without misunderstanding before."

"Yes, we have," commented Crane.

"Yes; an' I'd like to be in on this now. I didn't mean to forestall you."

Crane raised his hand in an attitude of supplication for the other man to desist, but Faust was not to be stopped.

"I made a mistake, an' I'm sorry; an' if you will tell me whether Diablo's good business for the Brooklyn, I'll back him now at the shorter price. There's no use of us bein' bad friends."

"I think Diablo's a fairly good bet," said Crane, quietly, entirely ignoring the question of friendship.

"It won't be poachin' if I have a bet, then?" asked the Cherub, more solicitous than he had appeared at an earlier stage of the game.

"Poachers don't worry me," remarked Diablo's owner. "I'm my own game keeper, and they usually get the worst of it. But you go ahead and have your bet."

"Thank you, there won't be no more bad breaks made by me; but I didn't mean to give you none the worst of it. Good day, sir," and he was gone.

"Faust has had his lesson," thought Crane, as he took from a drawer the stable-boy's ill-favored note.

"I wonder who sent me this scrawl? It gave me a pointer, though. I suppose the writer will turn up for his reward; but the devil of it is he'll sell information of this sort to anyone who'll buy. Must weed him out when I've discovered the imp. At any rate Faust will go straight, now he's been scorched. I'll just re-enter that bet to the Little Woman while I think of it. 'Three thousand seven hundred and fifty to fifty, Diablo for the Brooklyn, laid to Miss Allis Porter.'" Then he dated it. "She loses by this transaction, but that won't matter; it will be a pretty good win if it comes off. She may even refuse this, though she shouldn't, for it's a part of the bargain that I was to have a bet on for her, a small bet, of course. Yes, yes; I remember, a small bet. But this is a small bet. There was nothing said about the size of the winnings. She was probably thinking of gloves. Jingo, she has a lovely hand, I've noticed it; long slim fingers, even the palm is long; sinewy I'll warrant; nothing pudgy about that hand. Hey, Crane, you're silly!" he cried, half audibly, taking himself to task; "doing business in big moneys—a cool seventy-five thousand, if it materializes, perhaps even more—and then slipping off into a mooney dream, vaporing about a girl's slim hand. I suppose that's the love symptom. But at forty! it's hardly my normal condition, I fancy."

The slim hand beckoned him off into a disjointed reverie. Was he the better for it? What would the end be? Before the new emotion he could look back upon his past struggles with sordid satisfaction. Men in battle were not given to uneasy qualms of compunction, nor questionings as to the method that had led to victory. His life had been one long-drawn-out battle;

the financial soldiers that had fallen by the wayside because of his sword play did not interest him; they were dead; being dead, their memory harrassed him not at all. If there were commercial blood stains upon his hand, they were hidden by the glove of success. After a manner he had had peace; now all was disquiet; the turmoil of an awakened gentler feeling clashing with the polemics of self-satisfying selfishness. And all because of a girl! To him that was the peculiar feature of the disturbance in his nature. He, Philip Crane, the strong man of strong men, to be shorn of his indifference to everything but success by a girl unskilled in managing anything but a horse.

"It's all very fine to argue it out with one's self," he thought, "but I simply can't help it." He was astonished to find that he was pacing up and down the floor of his apartment. Undoubtedly he was possessed of a tremendous regard for the girl Allis. But why not put it from him; why not conquer himself as he had always done? To let it master him meant the giving up of things that were almost second nature. He could not love the girl as a good woman should be loved, and—and—well, the gray eyes that had their strength because of supreme honesty would surely bring him disquietude. It would indeed be difficult to change his nature much; his habits were almost like leopard's spots; they were grown into the woof of his existence. Even if he won her it must be almost entirely because of a superior diplomacy. Everything told him that his love was not returned. It seemed almost impossible that it should be; there was not more disparity in their years than in their two selves. "All very fine again," he muttered, somewhat savagely; "I want her, I want

her, not because of anything but love. What she is, or what I am counts for nothing; love is all compelling; my first master, I salute thee," this in sarcastic sincerity.

In his strength he relied upon his power to bring forth an answering love, at least regard, should he win Allis. Yes, it would surely come. He had not even a young rival to combat. Yes, he would win, first Allis, and afterward her love.

"I'm quite silly," he ejaculated; "but I can't help it. But I can go out and get some fresh air, and I will."

XXII

It was the middle of May. Down in the earth the strong heart of re-awakened nature throbbed with a pulsating force that sent new life forth on its errand of rejuvenation. The apple trees had peeped out with pink eyes, and seeing the summer maiden stalking through the land, had thrown off their timid coyness and shaken loose a drapery of white, all rose-tinted and green-shaded, that turned their broad-acred homes into fairy ball rooms. And for music the bees, and the birds, and shrill fife-playing frogs volunteered out of sheer joyousness of life.

Tiny shavings of green wax, the gentle spring grass, lay strewn about the ballroom floor, and glistened in the warm light that was of one high-hung chandelier, the sun.

But all the newborn awakening, all the sweet strength of soul and life that was borne to the waiting land on the wings of soft winds, brought not the hoped-for allotment to John Porter.

At Ringwood they had waited for the springtime. That would work the cure the doctor's skill had failed of. A man of outdoors, it was the house caging that was killing him, keeping him back.

These things were said; but Doctor Rathbone only shook his wise old head, with its world of good sense, and answered: "It is none of these things. The trouble is in his mind; he is fretting. A sensitive man, well in

body, may be brought to illness by anticipated disaster. That could not have been the case with John Porter well, but John Porter ill is quite a different matter. It's as I have said before, give him hope, win him races."

So Allis was really glad at the near approach of the time of her trial. The day was coming fast, soon, when she was to go forth with her little band of horses, as a man almost in everything, to strive for the fulfillment of that which had been put upon her.

The nearness of the not-to-be-shirked responsibility drove into her veins an unlooked-for exhilaration of strength. She had thought that she would look with dread upon the going away from Ringwood; that a feeling much akin to stage fright would quite unnerve her at the very last. The riding at home, the horse lore, and the almost constant companionship with her father, always among horses and horsemen, though it appeared somewhat dreadful to the village folks had been as nothing to her. Now that she needed strength for the newer, stranger endeavor, it came to her, even as the blossoms came to the swaying apple trees, great and small.

What wouldn't she do? she asked herself many times, to bring a strength-giving peace to her father's troubled mind. Even Mrs. Porter, implacably bitter against racing, must condone what was so evidently Allis's study, if it tended to their happiness; the mother *had* softened somewhat in the austerity of her opposition.

Evening after evening they had discussed the gloomy outlook, with, always from Allis's side, a glimmer of hopeful light. The girl's patient resolve had worn down the mother's pessimistic dread of anticipated evil.

"You know, Allis," she had said, "how I look upon this thoroughly unchristian pursuit. Nothing can justify it from a true woman's point of view, absolutely nothing—not even poverty. I would willingly suffer the loss of all we possess—that it is so little is due to this dreadful, immoral horse racing—but I would sacrifice even what remains, if your father were well and willing to start afresh in some occupation befitting his noble character. I would help him to endure every hardship, even deprivation, without a murmur."

"But, mother," interrupted Allis, "it's impossible now; I think it always was, for, as you know, father knew nothing of other business. Nothing would tempt him to be dishonest in racing, and he always enjoyed it because of his love for horses. But with all that, mother, if he had been in a position to please you, if he had felt that we—you, and Alan, and I—would not have suffered, I am sure he would have listened to your pleadings and given it up. He might perhaps have gone on breeding horses, for you wouldn't have objected to that, would you, mother?"

"No, it's the wicked associations of the race course which I felt degraded a man of your father's character. But I'm not going to dishearten you, Allis, nor hamper you now in your brave acceptance of the task that has come to you, because of wrong done before. It is distasteful to me, of course; it would be to any right-minded mother, to have her daughter in a position so repellant; but, strange as it may seem, I'd rather you went with the horses than Alan."

"Alan couldn't go, mother; he couldn't give up his place in the bank; besides, father has purposely kept him from racing."

"I know it, Allis; I wasn't thinking of that, though. Alan has the gambling spirit born in him; it's not his fault; it's the visitation of the sins of the father upon the son. It came to your father in just the same way. No, I'm not even blaming your father for it; it has come down from generation to generation; but there has never been dishonor, thank God—there has never been a dishonest Porter in my husband's family, and, please God, there never may be. That would be too much! It would kill me. And it's better that you go, Allis, for Alan is but a boy, and the temptations to a young man at the race course must be almost impossible to resist. Besides, your going may bring new life to your father; the doctor is so hopeful—he says it will. He was afraid that he had shocked me, when he said you were to win races for your father's good. It displeased the pastor; I know it did, but perhaps he doesn't quite understand how much we have at stake."

"He's so narrow, mother."

"The Reverend Mr. Dolman thinks only of our souls, daughter; naturally, too, and one can hardly be a Christian and race horses. But we have got so much to consider. I hope I am not wrong in feeling glad that you are able to look after our interests. I should like to pray for your success even, Allis. It might be wrong; I might feel guilty; but if it makes your father better, don't you think I'd be forgiven?"

"I'm sure you would, mother, and it would make me stronger. I'm so glad. I didn't want to displease you. I wanted you to feel that I was doing right. It will be lighter now; I sha'n't mind what anybody says if you're with me, mother. Now everything will come out right; I know it will. And if it does, if father gets strong,

just out of thankfulness, I'll coax him to try something else, for your sake, mother."

"No, for his own, Allis. I think only of him in this matter."

The prospective commencement of the racing campaign seemed to foreshadow a complete fulfillment of the doctor's prophecy should success smile upon this modern Joan of Arc; for the bustle of preparation was music to the ears of the stricken man, and he fought the lethargic fever of discontent that was over him until his eyes brightened and his face took on a hopeful look of interest.

"Brave little woman," he said to Allis, "it's a shame for a great hulk as I am to lie up here, while you fight the sharks that were almost too much for your father."

Then he spoke a little lower, as a man utters unfamiliar words for the first time. "Your mother said that Providence would look after you. Sounds strange, doesn't it, girl? But I'm glad. Your mother was so bitter—I don't blame her—now she's turned right around. And, Allis, I believe with a little tempting, a little coaxing, she'd almost have a bet on Lucretia in your hands. Funny, isn't it?" And he gave a little chuckle.

Allis hadn't heard her father laugh for a long time. It wasn't much of a laugh, very dry, and very short lived, hardly lighting up his face at all, but still it was the feeble pulsation of humor which showed that the old John Porter spirit was not quite broken.

"About the betting, Allis, you must have Dixon come down here to see me, for the horses are to go to his stable again, aren't they?"

"Yes, father."

"That's right. I thought we had arranged it that way, but I seem to forget things since that bad tumble."

"You don't forget much now, father; you're getting stronger in every way."

"Blarney, girl. But I don't mind; your blarney is like the sunshine, that comes through the window every day at ten. Ah, I know to the very minute when to look for it. But about Dixon. Have him come down, for we must arrange to back Lucretia—she's worth it. She's been doing well, hasn't she, girl? O God! why can't I go out into the open and see the little mare do just one gallop? And then I'd like to sit and look at the trees sway back and forth in the wind. Their swing is like the free gallop of a good horse."

He dropped the brief, fretful remonstrance against fate with an apologetic turning away of his head, and continued about the Trainer.

"Lucretia's in the Brooklyn, Allis; you know that, of course. If Dixon starts her, the stake alone will be about enough to run for, for a three-year-old has a tough job ahead in that mob of picked horses. But you'll get a line on her there—I think she'll win with ninety-two pounds up; but if she shows good form, then she'll have to be backed for the Brooklyn Derby. Lucretia's the best three-year-old in the land, I know. We'll have to arrange for that money. There will be a couple of thousand to be had if it seems safe business. You and Dixon will judge of that. You're taking Lauzanne, girl. Is it worth while?"

"Lauzanne is going to do great things for us, father. I'm *sure* of it."

"Still young, Allis. I talked like that when I was your age. Fancy and horse racing go arm in arm al-

ways, and they're like an experienced man of forty hob-nobbing with the little love god; they're just about as well mated."

Porter's irrelevant simile caused Allis to start, and Crane's relentless eyes came and peeped at her through the narrow-slitted lids.

"All right, though, little girl; your faith may make Lauzanne win, and I think Lucretia's speed will carry her to the front, so you may strike a bit of luck at last."

XXIII

A FEW days later Mike Gaynor took the stable up to Gravesend. Dixon had a cottage there, which he occupied with his wife, and Allis was to stop with them.

On the 20th of May the horses were settled in their racing quarters. Only four days remained for introducing Lucretia to the Gravesend track; on the 24th she would take up her ninety-two pounds and be tested to the utmost in the great Brooklyn Handicap.

Dixon felt that several things were in her favor. She was as quiet as an old cow at the post; many false starts would improve rather than diminish her chances, for nothing seemed to excite the gallant little brown mare. Her great burst of speed would enable the jockey to get out of the ruck and steal a good place to lie handy at the leader's heels. She could be nursed to the last furlong of the stretch, for the sight of horses in front would not daunt her brave spirit.

Against the mare were two or three rather important factors; she was slight of build, not overstrong, and the crush of contending horses might knock her out of her stride, should they close in. Then there was just a suspicion of lack of staying power in the Assassin strain; Lucretia might not quite last the mile and a quarter so early in the season, being a mare. However, she had a chance.

"But I'd hardly call it a betting chance," Dixon said, speaking to Allis; "there's never been a three-year-old

won the Brooklyn yet. There'll be openings enough to put down the money later on—in the Derby, if the mare pans out well."

Andy Dixon was first of all a careful man. "There are risks enough in racin' without lookin' for them," he said. "When one has got an absolute lead-pipe cinch, it's two to one against its coming off." That was another of his conservative aphorisms.

Andy made no big wins, had never been booked as a successful plunger, had never skinned the ring; on the other hand, bringing the scales of equity to a dead level, he had never been forced to ask any man to pay his feed bills for him, nor let an account stand over for a time.

Allis was in good hands, and, what added to the value of the situation, she knew it, and would take Dixon's advice. The Trainer's opinion was borne out by the betting market; Lucretia stood a long way down in the list. Even Diablo, bad horse as he was supposed to be, was at a shorter price; the heavy outlay of his owner, and some intangible rumors having caused the bookmakers to feel inclined to hold him close up against their chests. His work since his trial with The Dutchman had been quite satisfactory. He looked upon Westley, the jockey, as a friend, and strode along in his gallops as though he had never sulked or shown temper in his life.

Favoritism for the Brooklyn was divided between The King, a five-year-old that had won it the year before, and White Moth, a three-year-old, winner of the last year's Futurity.

Jockey Redpath had been riding Lucretia in her gallops since she had come to Gravesend. At last Dixon had been singularly fortunate in the matter of jockeys.

Redpath was just making his reputation, making it as all jockey reputations are made, by winning races.

This somewhat unstudied factor in racing had loomed large on his mental vision. It might be possible to acquire a reputation in other professions by good fortune or favor. As a jockey, a light weight might possibly make money by dishonest methods, though that itself seemed doubtful, but there was no way to rise to the top of the tree except by riding winners; verily there was one royal road to fame in the field. Knowing all this, Redpath rode to win.

On the 22d Dixon gave Lucretia a good strong three-quarter gallop over the handicap course; on the 23d she had a quiet canter; and on the morning of the 24th, the eventful day, she poked her mouse-brown nozzle over the bar of her stall when Allis came to look at her and seemed to say, "I'll do my part to-day."

Nothing could have been wished for in Lucretia's appearance that wasn't there, except just the faint suspicion of a sacrifice of strength to speed. But if the frame wasn't there, the good strong heart was; the courage and the gentleness, and the wisdom, and the full glow of perfect health.

For hours the trains had borne to Long Island crowd after crowd of eager, impatient New Yorkers. Lovers of horses, lovers of gambling, pure and simple; holiday makers, and those who wished to see the Brooklyn run out of sheer curiosity; train after train whirled these atoms of humanity to the huge gates of the Gravesend arena, wherein were to battle that day the picked thoroughbreds, old and young.

Even like bees, black-coated and buzzing, the eager ones swarmed from the cars and rehived in the great

stand. Betting ring, and paddock, and lawn became alive because of their buzz; tier after tier, from step to roof, the serrated line of white-faced humanity waited for the grand struggle.

The first race was but a race, that was all. Horses galloped, but did they not gallop other days? It was not the Brooklyn. And also the second was but another race. How slow, and of what little interest were the horses! Verily, neither was it the Brooklyn, and it was the Brooklyn forty thousand pairs of eyes had come to see.

Down in the betting ring men of strong voices bellowed words of money odds, and full-muscled shoulders pushed and carried heads about that were intent on financial businesses. But what of that? It was not the Brooklyn, it was gambling.

Out in the paddock a small brown mare of gentle aspect, with big soft eyes, full of a dreamy memory of fresh-shooting grass, walked with easy stride an elliptical circle. Her fetlocks fair kissed the short grass in an unstable manner, as though the joints were all too supple. Inside of the circle stood Allis Porter and a man square of jaw and square of shoulder, that was Andy Dixon. Presently to them came Mike Gaynor.

"We're gittin' next it now, Miss Allis; we'll soon know all about it."

"We're all ready, Mike," said Dixon, with square solemnity. "When they've beat the little mare they'll be catchin' the judge's eye."

"There's nothing left now, Mike, but just a hope for a little luck," added the girl.

"Ye'r talking now, Miss Allis. Luck's the trick

from this out. The little mare'll have a straight run this trip. Here's the b'y comin' now, and a good b'y he is."

A little man in blue jacket and white stars joined them, saluting Miss Allis with his riding whip. "Are you going to win, Redpath?" asked the girl.

"I'm going to try, Miss. She's a sweet mare to ride, but it's a big field. There's some boys riding that ought to be in the stable rubbing horses."

"You'll have to get out in front," said Dixon, speaking low; "your mare's too light to stand crowdin', an' even if you have to take her back for a breather after you've gone half the journey, she'll come again, for she's game."

"Them Langdon fellows thinks they've got a great chance wit' our cast-off, Diablo," volunteered Mike. "I had a peep at him in the stall, an' he's lookin' purty fit."

"*He* never was no class," objected Dixon.

"If ye'd see him gallop the day he run away, ye'd think he had class," said Mike. "Bot' t'umbs up! ye'd a t'ought it was the flyin' Salvator."

"Well, we'll soon know all about it," declared Dixon. "There's the saddlin' bell. Have you weighed out, Redpath? Weight all right, ninety-two pounds?"

"All right, sir. It was a close call to make it, though; there was a few ounces over."

"All the better; it's a hot day, an' if they're long at the post it'll take them spare ounces out of you, I fancy."

Dixon held up his finger to the boy that was leading Lucretia, and nodding his head toward the stall led the way.

"We're number seven, Mike," said Allis, looking at

the leather tag which carried the figure on Jockey Redpath's right arm.

" 'There's luck in odd numbers, said Rory O'Moore,' " quoted Mike.

"I've a superstitious dread of seven," the girl said; "it's the one number that I always associate with disaster—I don't mind thirteen a bit."

"We'll break the bad luck seven to-day," asserted little Redpath, bravely.

"I hope so," answered Allis. "Let me put my finger on the number for good luck," and she touched the badge on his arm. "Now I'm going up to get a good seat in the stand," she continued; "I'll leave Lucretia to you, Redpath."

XXIV

As the slight figure, looking slighter still in a long trailing race coat, passed through the paddock gate to the stand enclosure, Mike Gaynor spoke to the jockey.

"Redpath, me b'y, it's up to ye to put yer best leg for'ard to-day. Ye'r ridin' for the greatest little woman in this big country. In all the stand up there, wit' their flounces and jewels, there isn't a lady like her. Not wan av them judys kin touch her as a rale proper lady. God bless me, she's de sweetest—" then he checked himself; he was going to say the sweetest filly, but even to his rough-hewn mind, tutored only by horse lore, it seemed sacrilege to speak of Miss Porter as anything but a lady.

"You're right, Mike," concurred the little man; "I'd rather ride the mare for her than White Moth, or The King, or any of the favorites for their owners."

"An' the ould man lyin' there at home on his back, eh, Redpath? He's as good as gold hisself; that's where the girl gets it; not sayin' a word ag'in Mrs. Porter; she don't understand, that's all. But ye'll put up the ride of your life, me b'y, won't ye?"

"I'll do that, old chap."

"Mike'll stand by ye," affirmed Gaynor. "Say, b'y," and he turned and looked squarely into the eyes of the little man, "I know if they beats ye to-day, 'twon't be yer fault—'cause why?"—and he put his hand on Redpath's shoulder—" 'cause ye'r like many

another man, sweet on the young Missis. Now, now, now stop that!" and he held up his finger warningly, as the other raised his voice in mild protest; "it's to yer credit. It'll do ye no good in wan way, av coorse, for, as ye say, she'll never know it." Redpath had not made the statement Mike attributed to him, but the latter was giving him a kindly pointer. "But it'll do ye no harm. The likin' av a good woman will sometimes make a man av a scoundrel, but ye'r a long way from bein' that, me b'y; so it'll do ye tons av good. There's the bugle; go an' mount, an' I'll watch how ye get on; an' good luck to ye."

Regally, one after another, in stately file, the turf kings, decked out with the silken jackets that rested a-top—crimson, and gold, and blue, and white, and magpie, passed through the paddock gate to the newly smoothed course. Very modest and demure number seven, the little brown mare, looked beside the strong-muscled giants, bright bay, golden chestnut, and raven-wing black, that overshadowed her in the procession that caught the forty thousand pairs of eyes. Something of this thought came to Allis, sitting in the stand. What a frail little pair they were, both of them, and to be there battling for this rich prize that was so hardly fought for, by strong men athirst for gold, and great horses a-keen for the gallop!

Ah, there was Diablo, the very number Allis had said carried no dread for her, thirteen. What a strange coincidence! What a cruel twist of fate it would be if he were to win!—he looked equal to it. A man sitting at Allis's elbow suddenly cried in a voice enthused into the joyous treble of a boy's: "Look at that big Black; isn't he a beaut? Number thirteen. That's a hoodoo

number, if you like; it's enough to give a backer cold feet."

"I thought you weren't superstitious, Rex;" this was a woman's voice.

"I'm not, an' I'm going straight down to back that Black, thirteen and all."

On Allis's other side one of the party was ticking off the horses by their numbers as they passed; "One, two, that's White Moth; they say she'll win; three, Red Rover; four, what's that? that's George L.; five, six, seven; just look at that little runt. What is it? Oh, Lucretia. Might as well run a big calf, I should think."

"She's just lovely," declared a lady in the party. "She's as graceful as a deer, and I'm sure she'll run as fast as any of them."

"Can't live in that mob; they'll smother a little thing like her," declared the man, emphatically. "Where are we—ten, eleven, The King, that's the winner for a hundred. Look at him. He carries my money. It's all over now; they can't beat him. That's a fine looker, though, thirteen,—Diablo, eh? What's that horse Diablo, George?" turning to one of the men.

"No good—a maiden; I looked them all up in the dope book; how they expect to win the Brooklyn with a maiden gets beyond me."

Somewhat tortured, Allis listened to the voluble man on her left, who was short and fat, and red of face, as he graded, with egotistical self-sufficiency, the thirteen competitors for the big Handicap. Lucretia he had passed over in disdain. Crude as his judgment seemed, arrogantly insufficient, it affected Allis disagreeably. Now that everything had been done, that the last minute of suspense was on, she was depressed. The ex-

hilaration of preparation had gone from her, and the words of the captious man on her left, "that little runt," hung with persistent heaviness on her soul. All the vast theater of the stand was a buzz of eager chatter. Verily it was a race; it was the Brooklyn Handicap. Lips that smiled gave a mocking lie to drawn, strained faces, and nervous, shifting eyes, that told of the acceptance of too deep a hazard. The weeks and months of mental speculation embodied in heavy bets would have their fruit ripened and plucked within a brief half hour.

Allis's gaze dropped to the grass lawn in front of the stand for a minute, her eyes seeking repose from the strain of watching the horses as they went down to the starting post. How fretfully erratic were the men who dotted its green sward with gray and solemn black! The deeper interest Allis had over there on the course where was the little mare, seemed to lift her to a great height above them. How like ants they were, crossing and recrossing each other's paths, twisting and turning without semblance of an objective point, creatures of an impulse almost lower than instinct, devoid of this well-directed governing motive. Yes, they were like an army of ants that had been suddenly thrown into confusion. She saw one of them come hurriedly out of the paddock, talking impetuously with bended head —for he was tall—to a short man in gray tweed, beyond doubt a trainer. Suddenly the tall man broke away, hurried to the rail which separated the lawn from the course, leaned far over its top to take a last look at the horses, and then with a queer shuffling trot he hurried to the mob that was surging and pushing about the bookmakers. Allis noted with minute observance each little act in this pantomime of the last-minute

plunge Just beneath where she sat two men were having a most energetic duel of words. A slim, dark-skinned youth, across whose fox-like face was written in large letters the word "Tout," was hammering into his obdurate companion the impossibility of some certain horse being defeated. Presently the other man's hand went into his pocket, and when it came forth again five ten-dollar bills were counted with nervous reluctance and hesitatingly made over to the Tout. Tight clutching his prize this pilot of the race course slipped from Allis's sight and became lost in the animated mass that heaved and swayed like full-topped grain in a harvest breeze.

Within all that enclosure there seemed no one possessed of any calm. To the quiet girl it was a strange revelation; no one could have as much at stake as she had, and yet over her spirit there was nothing beyond the lethargy of depression. No; no one is calm, she thought. Ah, the assertion was too sweeping. Coming up the steps, just at her right, was a man who might have been walking in a quiet meadow, or a full-leafed forest, for all there was of agitation in his presence. A sudden new thought came to Allis; she had never seen that face distraught but once. The collected man was Philip Crane. A tinge of almost admiration tingled the girl's mind. To be possessed of calm where all was nervous strain was something.

Suddenly the unimpassioned face lighted up; the narrow-lidded eyes gleamed with brightened interest. As eagerly as a boy their owner, Crane, came forward and saluted Allis. At that instant the man of many words on her left rose from his seat to chase through the interminable crowd on the lawn a new victim.

Allis had sought to be alone in this short time of trial; she was hardly sure of herself. If Lucretia failed she might break down; for what would come to her father should the message home be one of disaster? Even if the little mare won her joy might lead her to commit strange pranks; she felt that her heart would burst out of sheer joy, if she did not shout in exultation, or caper madly, as she had seen others do in the hour of victory. She was sorry that Crane had come.

"I was looking for you," he said; "I want to see you win this race; that is, if—I mean, like every other man here, I have harked back to my natural instinct of covetous acquisition and had a bet on."

"Not Lucretia?"

"No—I've bet on Diablo. Langdon thinks he'll win. Do you remember the agreement about his purchase?"

"What was that? I've half forgotten it."

"Just a little bet on your account, you know."

"Oh, I remember; but that was only in fun, wasn't it?"

"It was part of the bargain, and it's on. You'll take it, won't you, if he wins—"

"They're off!" Some one had shouted the magic words from the head of the steps. In a second every voice of the thousands was stilled, and there was only the noise of shuffling feet, as eager watchers stood up to see the horses.

"It's a false start," said Crane, quietly, turning toward the girl. "It would have been well for you, Miss Allis, had the starter let them go. Lucretia was well out in the lead; it was Diablo's fault, too, that they had to go back—he was left standing."

Crane's voice was Fate's voice. Would there never

be anything but Lucretia and Diablo, seven and thirteen, thirteen and seven?

"Diablo's a bad horse at the post, sure," ejaculated Crane, letting his field glass rest for an instant on his knee; "he just backs up and shakes his head viciously; evidently he doesn't like the idea of so much company."

"How is Lucretia acting, Mr. Crane?"

"Perfectly. You must have instilled some of your own patience into her."

The girl hardly heard the implied compliment.

Would the patience be rewarded? Or would thirteen, that was symbolical of evil, and its bearer, Diablo, who was an agent of evil, together snatch from her this prize that meant so much? It was strange that she should not think of the other horses at all. It was as though there were but two in the race—Lucretia and Diablo—and yet they were both outsiders.

"The Starter is having a bad time of it; that makes six false breaks," said Allis's companion; "it will end by his losing patience with the boys, I fear, and let them go with something off in a long lead. But they say this Fitzpatrick is a cool hand, and gives no man the best of it. He'll probably fine Diablo's rider a hundred dollars; I believe it's customary to do that when a jockey persistently refuses to come up with his horses. Just look at that!—the black fiend has lashed out and nearly crippled something."

"Not Lucretia, Mr. Crane!" gasped Allis.

"No, it's a chestnut—there they go! Good boy, Westley. I mean Diablo's jockey has done a fiendish clever thing. He came through his horses on the jump, carried them off their feet, they all broke—yes, the flag's down, and he's out with a clean lead."

Down in front a bell was clanging viciously; people were rushing with frenzied haste from the betting ring, and clambering up the steps of the stand; in the stand itself the whole vast mob had risen to its feet, and even now the rolling beat of eager hoofs was in the air, hushed of the mob's clamor.

Yes, Crane had spoken truly; a great striding black, along whose neck hung close a tiny figure in yellow and red, was leading the on-coming horses. Allis strained her eyes trying to discover the little mare, but she was swallowed up in the struggling mob that hung at Diablo's heels. As they opened a little, swinging around the first turn, Allis caught sight of the white-starred blue jacket. Its wearer was quite fifth or sixth.

"Lucretia is doing well," said Crane; "she's holding her own; she's lapped on White Moth."

It seemed strange to Allis that any other thought should come into her mind at that time other than just concern for Lucretia, but she caught herself wondering at Crane's professional words of description. For the time he was changed; the quick brevity of his utterance tokened an interested excitement. He was not at all like the Crane she knew, the cold, collected banker.

"Lucretia's doing better," her companion added a few seconds later. "If I were given to sentiment, I should say her gallop was the poetry of motion. She deserves to win. But honestly, Miss Allis, I think she'll never catch the Black; he's running like a good horse."

Allis could not answer; the strain was too great for words. It would be all over in a minute or so; then she would talk.

"Your mare is creeping up, Miss Allis; she's second

to the Black now, and they've still a good three furlongs to go. You may win yet. It takes a good horse to make all his own running for a mile and a quarter and then win. His light weight may land him first past the post. There are only four in it now, the rest are beaten off, sure. Diablo is still in the lead; White Moth and Lucretia are a length back; and The King is next, running strong. It's the same into the stretch. Now the boys are riding; Lucretia is drawing away from White Moth—she's pressing Diablo. You'll win yet!"

His voice was drowned by the clamor that went up from every side. "Diablo! White Moth! Lucretia!" What a babel of yells! "He's beat! Come on!" It was deafening. All the conjecture of months, all the hopes and fears of thousands, compressed into a few brief seconds of struggling endeavor.

Allis had sat down. There was less frenzied excitement thus.

"God of Justice!" it was Crane's voice, close to her ear; his hot breath was on her cheek; he had leaned down, so that she might hear him. "Your jockey has sold you, or else Lucretia quit. I thought I saw him pull her off. I'm sorry, Miss Allis, God knows I am, though I've won—for Diablo is winning easily." Then he straightened up for an instant, only to bend down again and say, "Yes, Diablo has won, and Lucretia is beaten off. Perhaps it wasn't the boy, after all, for it's a long journey for a three-year-old mare. Can I do—anything for you? Let me see you down to the paddock."

"Thank you," the girl answered, struggling with her voice. "Yes, I must go, for Dixon will be terribly disappointed. I must go and put a brave face on, I sup-

pose. It's all over, and it can't be helped. But you've won, and I congratulate you."

"Poor old dad!" she muttered to herself, "to have fairly given away Diablo just when he was ready to win a big race." With a tinge of bitterness the girl thought how much her mother's opposition was to blame for this narrow missing of a great victory. She was glad to get away from the cataract of voices that smothered her like great falling waters. There was little exultation. If it had been any solace to her, she had much companionship in her dashed hopes; for Diablo, the winner, had not been backed by the general public; the favorite, White Moth, had been beaten.

After the first outburst a sullen anger took possession of the race-goers. They had been wronged, deceived; another *coup* had been made by that trick manipulator, Langdon. How carefully he had kept the good thing bottled up. If the mob could have put into execution its half-muttered thoughts, every post about the Gravesend track would have been decorated with a fragment of Langdon's anatomy.

Even the bookmakers were less jubilant than usual over this winning of an outsider, for Crane, and Langdon, and Faust, and two or three others who had either received a hint or stumbled upon the good thing, had taken out of the ring a tidy amount of lawful currency.

XXV

CRANE accompanied Allis to the paddock gate; and she continued on to the fatal number seven stall. Lucretia had just been brought in, looking very distressed after her hard race. For an instant the girl forgot her own trouble at sight of the gallant little mare's condition. Two boys were busy rubbing the white-crusted perspiration and dust from her sides; little dark rivulets of wet trickled down the lean head that hung wearily.

"Well, we lost!" It was Dixon's voice at Allis's elbow. "That'll do," to the boys; "here, put this cooler on, and walk her about."

Then he turned to Allis again. "She was well up with the leaders half way in the stretch; I tho't she was goin' to win."

"Was it too far for her, Dixon?"

The Trainer did not answer at once; with him at all times questions were things to be pondered over. His knitted brows and air of hesitating abstraction showed plainly that this question of Allis's was one he would prefer to answer days later, if he answered it at all.

"Didn't she stop suddenly?" Allis asked, again.

"I couldn't just see from where I was what happened," he replied, evasively; "and I haven't asked the boy yet. She may have got shut in. Ah, here he comes now," as the jockey returned from the weighing scales.

Redpath seemed to think that some explanation was

necessary, as he came up to Allis and the Trainer, so he said: "The little mare seemed to have a chance when I turned into the stretch, an' I thought once I was goin' to win; but that big Black just kept galloping, galloping, an' I never could get to his head; I'd a been in the money, though, if somethin' hadn't bumped me; an' then my mount just died away—she just seemed to die away." He repeated this is a falling decadence, as though it best expressed his reason for finishing in the ruck.

"Well, we're beat, an' that's all there is to it," declared Dixon, half savagely; then he added, "an' by a cast-off out of your father's stable, too, Miss Allis. If there's any more bad luck owin' John Porter, hanged if I wouldn't like to shoulder it myself, an' give him a breather." Then, with ponderous gentleness for a big, rough-thrown-together man, he continued: "Don't you fret, Miss; the little mare's all right; she'll pull your father through all this; you just cheer up. I've got to go now an' look after her."

When the Trainer had gone the jockey turned to Allis, hesitatingly, and said: "Dixon's correct about the little mare; she's all right. I wouldn't speak even afore him, though he's all right too, but—" and he looked about carefully to see that nobody was within ear-shot. Two men were talking a little farther out in the paddock, and Redpath, motioning to Allis, stepped close to the stall that was next to the one Lucretia had occupied, "I could a-been in the money."

The girl started. Crane had said that the jockey had stopped riding.

"Yes, Miss; you mustn't blame me, for I took chances of bein' had up afore the Stewards."

"You did wrong if you didn't try to win," exclaimed Allis, angrily.

"I did try to win, but I couldn't. I saw that I'd never catch that big Black; he was going too strong; his long stride was just breaking the little mare's heart. She's the gamest piece of horseflesh—say, Miss Porter, believe me, it just hurt me to take it out of her, keeping up with that long-legged devil. If I could a-headed him once, just got to him once—I tried it when we turned into the straight—he'd have quit. But it was no use—the mare couldn't do it. With him out of the race I'd have won; I could a-been second or third as it was, but it might have done the little mare up so she wouldn't be any good all season. I thought a bit over this when I was galloping. I knew she was in the Brooklyn Derby, an' when I had the others beat at a mile, thinks I, if the public don't get onto it, Mr. Porter can get all his losses back in the Brooklyn Derby. That's why I eased up on the little mare. You don't think I could do anything crooked against you, Miss? Give me the mount in the Derby, an' your father can bet his last dollar that Lucretia'll win."

As he finished speaking Mike Gaynor shuffled moodily up to them. Usually Mike's clothes suggested a general despondency; his wiry body, devoid of roundness as a rat trap, seemed inadequate to the proper expression of their original design. The habitual air of endeavorless decay had been accentuated by the failure of Lucretia to win the Brooklyn. Mike had shrunken into his all-enveloping coat with pathetic moroseness. The look of pity in his eye when it lighted upon Allis gave place to one of rebellious accusation as he turned his head slowly and glared at Redpath.

"Ye put up a bad ride there, b'y," he commenced, speaking in a hard, dry, defiant tone; "a bad ride, an' no mistake. Mind I'm not sayin' ye could a-won, but ye might a-tried," and he waited for Redpath's defense.

"She was all out, Mike, beat; what was the use of driving her to death when she hadn't the ghost of a chance?"

"You're a little too hard on Redpath," remonstrated Allis; "he's just been telling me that he didn't wish to punish the mare unnecessarily."

"His business was to win if he could, Miss," answered Mike, not at all won over. "It was a big stake, an' he ought to've put up a big finish. The Black would've quit if ye'd ever got to his throat-latch; he's soft, that's what he is. An' just where ye could have won the race, p'r'aps, ye quit ridin' an' let him come home alone. It's queer b'ys that's ridin' now, Miss," Gaynor added, fiercely, nodding his head in great decision, and, turning away abruptly, the petulant moroseness showing deeper than ever in his wrinkled face.

"You mustn't mind Mike, Redpath," said Allis; "he's a good friend of our family, and is upset over the race, that's all."

"I don't blame him," answered the jockey; "he would have rode it out and spoiled your chance with the mare—that would have done no good."

"Still, I hardly like it," answered the girl. "I know you did it for my sake, but it doesn't seem quite right. Don't do anything like this again. Of course, I don't want Lucretia pushed beyond her strength, nor cut up with the whip, but she ought to get the place if she can. People might have backed her for the place, and we've thrown away their money."

"The bettors will look after their own interests, Miss Porter, and they wouldn't help you a little bit if you needed it; they'd be more like to do you a bad turn. If I'd driven the mare to death, an' been beaten for the place, as I might have, the papers would have slated me for cruelty. You must believe that I did it for the best, Miss."

"I do, and I suppose I must thank you, but don't do it again. I'd rather you didn't carry your whip at all on Lucretia; she doesn't need it; but don't ease her up if you've got a chance till you pass the winning post."

As the two finished speaking, and moved away, a thin, freckled face peered furtively from the door of stall number six. Just the ferret-like eyes and a knife-thin nose showed past the woodwork, but there could be no mistaking the animal. It was Shandy.

"I've got you again," he muttered. "Blast the whole tribe of you! I'll just pip you on that dirty work, blowed if I don't."

XXVI

THE Brooklyn had been run and won; won by Langdon's stable, and lost by John Porter's. That night Allis spent hours trying to put into a letter to her mother their defeat and their hopes in such a way as to save distress to her father. She wound up by simply asking her mother to get Dr. Rathbone to impart as much information as he deemed advisable to his patient.

They were a very depressed lot at Dixon's cottage that evening. Dixon was never anything else but taciturn, and the disappointment of the day was simply revolving in his mind with the monotonous regularity of a grindstone. They had lost, and that's all there was about it. Why talk it over? It could do no good. He would nurse up Lucretia, and work back into her by mile gallops a fitting strength for the Brooklyn Derby. With incessant weariness he rocked back and forth, back and forth in the big Boston rocker; while Allis, at a little table in a corner of the room, sought to compose the letter she wished to send home.

With apathetic indifference the girl heard a constrained knock at the cottage door; she barely looked up as Dixon opened to a visitor. It was Crane who entered.

At almost any other time his visit would have been unpleasant. In his presence even the most trivial conversation seemed shrouded in a background of interested intentions; but to-night Dixon's constrained

depression weighed heavy on her spirits and irritated her.

"Luck was against you to-day, Dixon," exclaimed the visitor.

"They were too strong for the little mare," answered the Trainer, curtly. "Our cast-off won, of course, but there were a half dozen in the race that would have beaten Lucretia, I fancy."

Allis looked inquiringly at the Trainer; he had not talked that way to her. Then a light dawned upon the girl. She had not associated Dixon with diplomacy in her mind, she knew that he could maintain a golden silence, but here he was, actually throwing out to the caller a disparaging estimate of Lucretia's powers. This perpetual atmosphere of duplicity was positively distasteful. In the free gallop of the horses there was nothing but an inspiration to honest endeavor; but in this subtle diplomacy Allis detected the touch of defilement which her mother so strongly resented. Perhaps to-night she was more sensitive to depressing influences; at any rate she felt a great weariness of the whole business. Then the spirit of resolve rose in open rebellion against these questionings; almost Jesuitical she became at once. What mattered the ways or means, so that she did no wrong? Was not the saving of her father's health and spirit, and his and her mother's welfare above all these trivial questionings; did not the end justify the means; might not her success, if the fates in pity gave her any, save her from—from—she did not even formulate in thought the contingency, for there stood the living embodiment of it—Crane; everything seemed crowding her into the narrow confines of her sacrificial crypt.

Crane had spoken to her on his entry. As she was writing he had continued his discussion of the race with Dixon; perhaps, even—it was a hopeful thought, born of desire—he had come to see the Trainer. Crane's next words dispelled that illusion. It was in answer to an observation from Dixon that he was forced to go to the stables, that Crane said: "If Miss Porter has no objection I'll remain a little longer; I want to discuss a matter concerning her father."

Allis felt quite like fleeing to the stables with Dixon; she dreaded that Crane was going to bring up again the subject of his affection for her. But the Trainer had passed out before she could muster sufficient moral courage to put in execution her half-formed resolve.

"I wanted to speak about that wager on Diablo," began Crane.

A thrill of relief shot through the girl's heart. Why had he troubled himself to come to her over such a trifling matter—a pair of gloves, perhaps half a dozen pairs even.

"I put the bet on some time ago," he continued, "when Diablo was at a long price. It was only a trifle, as we agreed upon—" Allis noticed that he laid particular stress upon "agreed." "But it has netted you quite a nice sum, three thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars."

Crane said this in a quiet voice, without unction; but it startled the girl—she stared in blank amazement. Her companion was evidently waiting for her to say something; seemed to expect an exclamation of joyous approval. She noticed that the gray eyes she so distrusted had taken on that distasteful peeping expression, as though he were watching her walk into a trap.

"I cannot take it," answered Allis, decisively, after a pause.

Crane raised his hand in mild protest.

"It was good of you, kind; but how could I accept a large sum of money like that when I am not entitled to it?"

"You are—it's yours. The bet was made in your name—I entered it at the time in my book, and the bookmaker is ready to pay the money over."

"I can't take it—I won't. No, no, no!"

"Don't be foolishly sensitive, Miss Allis. Think what your father lost when he parted with Diablo for a trivial thousand dollars; and it was my fault, for I arranged the sale. Your father's needs—pardon me, but I know his position, being his banker—yes, he needs this money badly."

"My father needs a good many things, Mr. Crane, which he would not accept as a gift; he would be the last man to do so. We must just go on doing the best we can, and if we can't succeed, that's all. We can't accept help, just yet, anyway."

She was bitter; the reference to her father's troubles, though meant partly in kindness, angered her. It caused her to feel the meshes of the net drawing closer about her, and binding her free will. The fight was indeed on. More than ever she determined to struggle to the bitter end. Almost indefinably she knew that to accept this money, plausible as the offering was, meant an advantage to Crane.

"You can't leave this large sum with the bookmaker," he objected. "He would like nothing better; he would laugh in his sleeve. I can't take it; it isn't mine."

"I won't touch it."

"Perhaps I had better speak to your father about it," said Crane, tentatively; "he can have no objection to accepting this money that has been won."

"Father won't take it, either," answered the girl; "I know his ideas about such matters. He won't take it."

Crane brought all his fine reasoning powers to bear on Allis, but failed signally in his object. He was unaccustomed to being balked, but the girl's firm determination was more than a match for his adaptable sophistry. He had made no headway, was quite beaten, when Dixon's opportune return prevented absolute discomfiture. Crane left shortly, saying to Allis as he bade them good night: "I'm sorry you look upon the matter in this light. My object in coming to-night was to give you a little hope for brightness in your gloomy hour of bad luck; but perhaps I had better speak to your father."

"I'd rather you didn't," she answered, somewhat pleadingly. "Dr. Rathbone has cautioned us all against worrying father, and this could have no other result than but to distress him."

Allis's letter had been completed, but she now added a postscript, telling her mother briefly of Crane's insistence over the bet, and beseeching her to devise some plan for keeping this new disturbing element from her father.

Crane was remaining over night in Gravesend, and, going back to his quarters, he reviewed the evening's campaign. He had expected opposition from Allis, but had hoped to overcome the anticipated objections; he had failed in this, but it was only a check, not defeat.

He smiled complacently over his power of self-control in having allowed no hint of his absorbing passion to escape him.

Acceptance of this money by Allis, the money which was the outcome of an isolated generous thought, would have given him a real advantage. To have spoken, though never so briefly of his hopes for proprietary rights, would have accentuated the girl's sensitive alarm. He was too perfect a tactician to indulge in such poor sword play; he had really left the question open. A little thought, influenced by the desperate condition of Porter's fortunes, might make Allis amenable to what was evidently her best interest, should she be approached from a different quarter.

Crane had made the first move, and met checkmate; the second move would be through Allis's mother; he determined upon that course. All his old cunning must have surely departed from him if he could not win this girl. Fate was backing him up most strenuously. Diablo had been cast into his hands—thrust upon him by the good fortune that so steadily befriended him. He was not in the habit of attributing unlooked-for success to Providence; he rarely went beyond fate for a deity. Unmistakably then it was fate that had cast the horoscope of his and Allis's life together. Never mind what means he might use to carry out this decree; once accomplished, he would more than make amends to the girl.

He drew most delightful pictures of the Utopian existence his wealth would make possible for Allis. For the father he would provide a racing stable that would bring profit in place of disaster. Crane smiled somewhat grimly as he thought that under those changed

circumstances even Allis's mother might be brought to condone her husband's continuance in the nefarious profession.

If for no other reason than the great success he had made in the Brooklyn Handicap with Diablo, his spirits were that evening impossible of the reception of even a foreshadowing of failure. A suppressed exhilaration rose-tinted every projected scheme. He would win Allis, and he would win the Brooklyn Derby with his good colt, The Dutchman.

He went to sleep in this happy glamour of assured success, and, by the inevitable contrariness of things, dreamed that he was falling over a steep precipice on The Dutchman's back, and that at the bottom Mortimer and Allis were holding a blanket to catch him in his fall. Even in his imaginative sleep, he was saved from a dependence upon this totally inadequate receptacle for a horse and rider, for he woke with a gasp after he had traveled with frightful velocity for an age through the air.

Crane was a man not given to superstitious enthrallment; his convictions were usually founded on basic manifestations rather than fanciful visions; but somehow the night's dream fastened upon his mind as he lingered over a breakfast of coffee and rolls. Even three cups of coffee, ferociously strong, failed to drown the rehearsal of his uncomfortable night's gallop. Why had he linked Mortimer and Allis together? Had it been fate again, prompting him in his sleep, giving him warning of a rival that stood closer to the girl than he?

More than once he had thought of Mortimer as a possible rival. Mortimer was not handsome, but he was young, tall, and square-shouldered—even his some-

what plain face seemed to reflect a tall, square-shouldered character.

Subconsciously Crane turned his head and scanned critically the reflection of his own face in a somewhat disconsolate mirror that misdecorated a panel of the breakfast room. Old as the glass was, somewhat bereaved of its quicksilver lining at the edge, it had not got over its habit of telling the truth. Ordinarily little exception could have been taken to the mirrored face; it was intellectual; no sign-manual of cardinal sin had been placed upon it; it was neither low, nor brutal, nor wolfishly cunning in expression. Its pallor rather loaned an air of distingue, but—and the examination was being conducted for the benefit of a girl of twenty—it was the full-aged visage of a man of forty.

More than ever a conviction fixed itself in Crane's mind that, no matter how strong or disinterested his love for Allis might be, he would win her only by diplomacy. After all, he was better versed in that form of love-making, if it might be so called.

Crane was expecting Langdon at ten o'clock. He heard a step in the breakfast room, and, turning his head, saw that it was the Trainer. Mechanically Crane pulled his watch from his pocket; he had thought it earlier; it was ten. Langdon was on time to a minute. Nominally what there was to discuss, though of large import, required little expression. With matters going so smoothly there was little but assurances and congratulations to be exchanged. Diablo's showing in the big Handicap confirmed Langdon's opinion that both the Black and The Dutchman had given them a great trial; probably they would duplicate their success with The Dutchman in the Brooklyn Derby. It was only a

matter of a few days, and the son of Hanover had steadily improved; he was in grand fettle.

Langdon's appreciation of Crane's cleverness had been enhanced by the successful termination of what he still believed was a brilliantly planned *coup*. He had never for an instant thought that Crane purchased the horse out of kindness to anyone. It was still a matter of mystery to him, however, why his principal should wish to keep dark just how he had learned Diablo's handicap qualities.

Accustomed to reading Langdon's mind, Crane surmised from the Trainer's manner that the latter had something that he had not yet broached. Their talk had been somewhat desultory, much like the conversation of men who have striven and succeeded and are flushed with the full enjoyment of their success. Suddenly the Trainer drew himself together, as if for a plunge, and said: "Did you notice Porter's mare in the Brooklyn, sir?"

"Yes; she ran a pretty good race for a three-year-old."

"She did, an' I suppose they'll start her in the Derby. Do you happen to know, sir?"

"I fancy they will," answered Crane, carelessly.

"She stopped bad yesterday; but I've heard somethin'."

Crane remembered his own suspicion as to Lucretia's rider, but he only said, "Well?"

"After the race yesterday the jockey, Redpath, was talkin'—to the Porter gal—"

Crane started. It jarred him to hear this horseman refer to Allis as "the Porter gal."

"Redpath told her," proceeded Langdon, "that when

he saw he couldn't quite win he pulled his mount off to keep her dark for the Derby."

"How do you know this?"

"A boy in my stable happened to be in the stall an' heard 'em."

"Who's the boy? Can you believe him?"

"It's Shandy. He used to be with the Porters."

Like a flash it came to Crane that the spy must be the one who had written him the note about Faust and the change of saddles.

"Well, that doesn't affect us, that I can see," commented Crane. "I'm not backing their mare."

"It means," declared Langdon, with great earnestness, "that if Lucretia could have beat all the others but Diablo, she has a rosy chance for the Derby; that's what it means. The Black got away with a flyin' start, and she wore him down, almost beat him; I doubt if The Dutchman could do that much. She was givin' him a little weight, too."

"Well, we can't help it. I've backed The Dutchman to win a small fortune, and I'm going to stand by it. You're in it to the extent of ten thousand, as you know, and we've just got to try and beat her with our colt; that's all there is to it."

"I don't like it," muttered Langdon, surlily. "She's a mighty good three-year-old to put up a race like that."

"She may go off before Derby day," suggested Crane; "mares are uncertain at this time of year."

"That's just it; if she would go off we'd feel pretty sure then. I think the race is between them."

"Well, we'll know race day; if she goes to the post, judging from what you say, it'll be a pretty tight fit."

"She didn't cut much figure last year when Lau-

zanne beat her." Langdon said this with a drawling significance; it was a direct intimation that if Lucretia's present jockey could be got at, as her last year's rider had been—well, an important rival would be removed.

Crane had not been responsible for the bribing of Lucretia's jockey, though he was well aware what had occurred; had even profited by it.

"There'll be no crooked work this time," he said; "nobody will interfere with the mare's rider, I hope," and he looked significantly at Langdon.

"I don't think they will," and the Trainer gave a disagreeable laugh. "From what Shandy tells me, I fancy it would be a bad game. The truth of the matter is that gosling Redpath is stuck on the gal."

Crane's pale face flushed hot.

"I believe that Shandy you speak of is a lying little scoundrel. I have an idea that he wrote me a note, a wretched scrawl, once. Wait, I've got it in my pocket; I meant to speak to you about it before."

Crane drew from the inner pocket of his coat a leather case, and after a search found Shandy's unsigned letter, and passed it over to the Trainer.

"It's dollars to doughnuts Shandy wrote it. Let me keep this, sir."

"You're welcome to it," answered Crane; "you can settle with him. But about the Derby, I have reasons for wishing to win that race, reasons other than the money. I want to win it, bad. Do you understand?"

"I think I do. When you say you want to win a race, you generally want to win it."

"Yes, I do. But see here, Langdon, just leave their jockey to take orders from his own master, see?"

"I wasn't goin' to put up no game with him, sir."

"Of course not, of course not. It wouldn't do. He's a straight boy, I think, and just leave him to ride the best he knows how. We've got a better jockey in Westley. Besides, the Brooklyn Handicap has taken a lot out of their mare; they may find that she'll go back after it. I think you'd better get rid of that Shandy serpent; he seems ripe for any deviltry. You can't tell but what he might get at The Dutchman if somebody paid him. If I'm any judge of outlawed human nature, he'd do it. I've got to run down to Brookfield on a matter of business, but shall be back again in a day or so. Just keep an eye on The Dutchman—but I needn't tell you that, of course."

"That two-year-old I bought at Morris Park is coughin' an' runnin' at the nose; I blistered his throat last night; he's got influenza," volunteered the Trainer.

"Keep him away from The Dutchman, then."

"I've got him in another barn; that stuff's as catchin' as measles."

"If The Dutchman were to get a touch of it, Porter would land the Derby with Lucretia, I fancy."

"Or if they got it in their stable we'd be on Easy Street."

"I suppose so. But Dixon's pretty sharp; he'll look out if he hears it's about. However, we've got to watch our own horse and let them do the same."

XXVII

THAT evening Langdon and Jakey Faust were closeted together in a room of the former's cottage. An A1 piece of villainy was on, and they were conversing in low tones.

"It's a cinch for The Dutchman if it wasn't for that damn mare Lucretia," Langdon observed, in an injured tone, as though somehow the mare's excellence was an unwarranted interference with his rights.

"What about the jock?" asked Faust.

"No good—can't be done. He's mooney on the gal."

"Huh!" commented the Cherub. "Did you talk it over with the Boss? He's not a bad guy gettin' next a good thing."

"He gave me the straight tip to give Redpath the go-by."

"What's his little game? Is he going to hedge on the mare?"

"No; he'll stand his bet flat-footed. Say, he's the slickest! If he didn't give me the straight office that the mare might get sick, then I'm a Dutchman."

"We're both Dutchmen." The Cherub laughed immoderately at his stupid joke. "See, we're both standin' for The Dutchman, ain't we?"

Langdon frowned at the other's levity. "You'll laugh out the other side your mouth if Lucretia puts up a race in the Derby like she did in the Handicap."

"But ain't she goin' to get sick? We could whip-saw them both ways then, that's if we knew it first. I could lay against her an' back your horse."

"I wish the old man wasn't so devilish deep; he makes me tired sometimes; gives it to me straight in one breath that he's got reasons for wantin' to win the race, an' then he pulls that preacher mug of his down a peg an' says, solemn like: 'But don't interfere with their jockey.' Then he talks about The Dutchman or Lucretia gettin' the influenza, an' that Andy Dixon is pretty fly about watchin' the mare. Now what do you make of all that, Jake?"

"Well, you are a mug. It don't need no makin' up. That book's all rounded to. He wants the mare stopped, an' don't want no muddlin' about with the jockey, see? Wasn't there a row over stoppin' Lucretia last year? Wasn't the boy set down for the meetin'? You ought to know; you had to pay through the nose for shuttin' his mouth. But what made the old man talk about the mare gettin' sick?"

Langdon searched his memory; just how was that subject started? "Damn it! yes, of course; I told him about the two-year-old havin' the influenza."

"Well, Dick, my boy, you've guessed it, though you weren't trying. Crane would like to see the Porter mare coughin'."

"But you can't take a strange horse into their stable, an' him sick," objected the Trainer.

"Right you are, Dick. But you could take the sickness there, if you had a boy with the sabe."

"I was thinkin' of that," said Langdon, reflectively; "I was wonderin' if that's what the Boss meant."

"Sure thing—that's his way; he never wants to

stand in for none of the blame, but he likes to feel sure that he's goin' to win."

"It looks a bit like it, damn me if it don't; an' I believe he was givin' me a pointer about the proper boy for the job, too. He said Shandy would get at a horse quick enough if he was paid for it."

"There you are; what more do you want? Would you have Crane get out on the housetop an' shout to you to go an' cruel Porter's mare? He's slick, he is, an' if it can be done you've got a great chance."

"I'm a poor man," whined Langdon, "an' I can't take no chances on loosin' ten thousand, if it can be helped."

"It's got to be done right away, 'cause it'll take a couple of days to get the mare coughin'."

"I told Shandy to come here," said the Trainer; "he ought to be turnin' up soon. When you hear him knock, just slip into that other room, an' leave the door open a little so that you can hear what takes place. God knows what that young imp wouldn't swear if a fellow had no witnesses. I think he's comin' here to-night to ask me to pay him to do some dirty job, an' I won't do it, see?" and he winked at Faust. "He's a bad boy," said the Bookmaker, in a tone of mock condemnation.

"There he is now," declared Langdon. "I hear a step on the gravel. Quick, slip into the room; he'll be peepin' through the windows; he's like a fox."

There was a knock at the door. When Langdon opened it Shandy shuffled into the room with a peculiar little rocking-horse sort of gait, just like the trot of a skunk. His whole appearance somehow suggested this despised animal.

"Have you heard anything from the Porter stable?" Langdon asked, when the boy had taken a seat.

"The little mare's well," the boy answered, laconically.

"That's bad luck for us, Shandy. We'll be poorer by the matter of a few thousand if they win the Derby."

"Who's we?" questioned Shandy, with saucy directness.

"The whole stable. A man has played The Dutchman to win a hundred thousand, an' he's goin' to give the boys, one or two of them, five hundred if it comes off."

The small imp's weak, red-lidded eyes took on a hungry, famished look. "What're you givin' us—is that straight goods?" he demanded, doubtingly.

Langdon didn't answer the question direct; he said: "My man's afraid somebody'll get at The Dutchman. There's a lot of horse sickness about, an' if anyone was to take some of the poison from a sick horse's nose and put it in The Dutchman's nostrils at night, why he'd never start in the Derby, I reckon."

A look of deep cunning crept into the boy's thin freckled face; his eyes contracted and blinked nervously.

"What th' 'ell's the difference? If the Porter mare starts Redpath thinks he's got a lead-pipe cinch."

"You'd lose your five hundred; that's the difference," retorted Langdon.

"An' if she doesn't start, an' our horse wins, I get five hundred? Is that dead to rights?"

"If The Dutchan wins you get the money," replied the Trainer, circumspectly. "You mustn't come to me, Shandy, with no game about takin' the horse sickness from our two-year-old an' fixin' Porter's mare, 'cause I can't stand for that, see?"

The boy would have interrupted, but Langdon motioned him to keep silent, and proceeded:—

"You see, if it leaked out an' we'd won a lot of money over The Dutchman, damn fools would say that I'd been at the bottom of it; an' if they had me up in front of the Stewards I couldn't swear that I'd had nothing to do with it."

He pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket, held it in front of Shandy's eyes, and said: "What did you write that letter for?"

The boy stared in blank amazement. He trembled with fear; it was the warning note he had sent to Crane.

"Now if I was to show that to Faust he'd put a pug on to do you up, see? I wouldn't give three cents for your carcass after they'd finished with you."

"I didn't mean nothin', s' help me God, I didn't," pleaded the boy; "give it back to me, sir."

"You can take it, only don't play me the double cross no more. If you're doin' anything crooked, don't mix me up in it. You couldn't get into Porter's stable, anyway, if you tried to fix the mare."

"I didn't say I was goin' to do no bloomin' job; but I could get in right enough."

"Well, I ain't puttin' you next no dirty work, but if you hear that the mare gets this horse sickness that's goin' about, let me know at once, see? Come here quick. If Faust got a chance to lay against the mare he probably wouldn't say anythin' about that note, if he did know."

"I'll give you the office, sir, when she's took sick."

"That's right. You ain't got any too many friends, Shandy, an' you'd better stick to them that'll help you."

"Do I get that five hundred, sure?"

"If Lucretia don't beat The Dutchman, you get it."

When the boy had gone Faust came forth from his hiding like a badger.

"That's a bad boy—a wicked boy!" he said, pulling a solemn face. "You're a good man, Langdon, to steer him in the straight an' narrer path. He'll take good care of The Dutchman for that five hundred."

"Yes, if you don't pay these kids well they'll throw you down; an' I ain't takin' no chances, Faust."

"The Porter mare might catch the influenza, eh, Dick?"

"If she does, I'll let you know at once, Jake. But I ain't in it. I threatened to kick that kid out when he hinted at something crooked."

"I heard you, Langdon, I'll take my oath to that. But I must be off now. You know where to find me if there's anything doin'."

XXVIII

THE next day, intent on persuading Porter to accept the money won over Diablo, Crane took a run down to Ringwood farm.

As Allis had foreshadowed, his visit was of no avail, so far as Porter's acceptance of the winnings was concerned.

With natural forethought Crane first talked it over with Mrs. Porter, but that good lady would have felt a sort of moral defilement in handling any betting money, much less this that seemed obscured in uncertainty as to its rightful ownership. She believed very much in Crane's *bona fides,* and had no doubt whatever but his statement of the case was absolutely truthful. But Allis had refused to accept the money; it would never do for her to go beyond her daughter's judgment. She even thought it unadvisable for Crane to discuss the matter with her husband; it would only worry him, and she was positive that, in his pride of independence, he would refuse to touch a penny that was not actually due him.

"But there's a payment on Ringwood due in a few days," Crane argued, "and we must arrange for that at all events. If this money, which is rightfully your family's, could be applied on that, it would make a difference, don't you think?"

"I suppose John must settle it," she said, resignedly; "perhaps you had better see him. I can't interfere one

way or the other. I have no head for business," she added, apologetically; "I'm not sure that any of us have except Allis. We just seem to drift, drift, drift."

Crane stated the facts very plausibly, very seductively, to John Porter. Porter almost unreasonably scented charity in Crane's proposal. He believed that the bet was a myth; Crane was trying to present him with this sum as a compensation for having lost Diablo. It wasn't even a loan; it was a gift, pure and simple. His very helplessness, his poverty, made him decline the offer with unnecessary fierceness. If Allis had refused it, if she were strong enough to stand without this charity, surely he, a man, battered though he was, could pass it by. He had received a hopeful message from Allis as to Lucretia's chances in the Derby; they felt confident of winning. That win would relieve them of all obligations.

"I can't take it," Porter said to Crane. "Allis is more familiar with the circumstances of the bet—if there was one—than I. It must just rest with her; she's the man now, you know," he added, plaintively; "I'm but a broken wreck, and what she says goes."

"But there's a payment on Ringwood falling due in a few days," Crane remonstrated, even as he had to Mrs. Porter.

Porter collapsed, fretfully. He could stand out against prospective financial stringency, but actual obligations for which he had no means quite broke down his weakened energy. He had forgotten about this liability, that is, had thought the time of payment more distant. He would be forced to recall the money he had given Dixon to bet on Lucretia for the Derby, to meet this payment to the bank.

Quite despondently he answered the other man. "I had forgotten all about it; this shake-up has tangled my memory. I can pay the money, though," he added, half defiantly; "it will hamper me, but I can do it."

A sudden thought came to Crane, an inspiration. "I've got it!" he exclaimed.

Porter brightened up; there was such a world of confidence in the other's manner.

"We'll just let this Diablo money stand against the payment which is about due on Ringwood; put it in the bank to cover it, so to speak; later we can settle to whom it belongs. At present it seems to be nobody's money; it's seldom one sees a few thousand going a-begging for an owner," he added, jocularly. "You say it isn't *yours; I know it isn't mine;* and most certainly it doesn't belong to the bookmaker, for he's lost it fair and square. We can't let him keep it; they win enough of the public's money."

Reluctantly, Porter gave a half-hearted acquiescence. He would have sacrificed tangible interests to leave the money that was in Dixon's hands with him to bet on Lucretia. It would be like not taking the tide at its flood to let her run unbacked when her chances of winning were so good, and the odds against her great enough to insure a big return.

It was after banking hours, quite toward evening, by the time Crane had obtained this concession. He had brought the winnings for John Porter's acceptance, should the latter prove amenable to reason. Now it occurred to him that he might leave the money with one of the bank staff, who could deposit it the next day.

Crane drove back to the village and went at once to the cashier, Mr. Lane's house. He was not at home;

his wife thought perhaps he was still in the bank. Crane went there in search of him. He found only Mortimer, who had remained late over his accounts. From the latter Crane learned that the cashier had driven over to a neighboring town.

"It doesn't matter," remarked Crane; "I can leave this money with you. It's to meet a payment of three thousand due from John Porter about the middle of June. You can put it in a safe place in the vault till the note falls due, and then transfer it to Porter's credit."

"I'll attend to it, sir," replied Mortimer. "I'll attach the money to the note, and put them away together."

On his way to the station Crane met Alan Porter.

"I suppose you'd like a holiday to see your father's mare run for the Derby, wouldn't you, Alan?" he said.

"I should very much, sir; but Mr. Lane is set against racing."

"Oh, I think he'll let you off that day. I'll tell him he may. But, like your mother, I don't approve of young men betting—I know what it means."

He was thinking, with bitterness, of his own youthful indiscretions.

"If you go, don't bet. You might be tempted, naturally, to back your father's mare Lucretia, but you would stand a very good chance of losing."

"Don't you think she'll win, sir?" Alan asked, emboldened by his employer's freedom of speech.

"I do not. My horse, The Dutchman, is almost certain to win, my trainer tells me." Then he added, apologetic of his confidential mood, "I tell you this, lest through loyalty to your own people you should lose

your money. Racing, I fancy, is very uncertain, even when it seems most certain."

Again Crane had cause to congratulate himself upon the somewhat clever manipulation of a difficult situation. He had scored again in his diplomatic love endeavor. He knew quite well that Allis's determined stand was only made possible by her expectation of gaining financial relief for her father through Lucretia's winning the Derby. Should she fail, they would be almost forced to turn to him in their difficulties. That was what he wanted. He knew that the money won over Diablo, if accepted, must always be considered as coming from him. The gradual persistent dropping of water would wear away the hardest stone; he would attain to his wishes yet.

He was no bungler to attempt other than the most gently delicate methods.

XXIX

ENCOURAGED by Jockey Redpath's explanation of his ride on Lucretia, Allis was anxious that Dixon should take the money her father had set aside for that purpose and back their mare for the Brooklyn Derby.

"We had better wait a day or two," Dixon had advised, "until we see the effect the hard gallop in the Handicap has had on the little mare. She ain't cleanin' up her oats just as well as she might; she's a bit off her feed, but it's only natural, though; a gallop like that takes it out of them a bit."

It was the day after Crane's visit to Ringwood that Dixon advised Allis that Lucretia seemed none the worse for her exertion.

"Perhaps we'd better put the money on right away," he said. "She's sure to keep well, and we'll be forced to take a much shorter price race day."

"Back the stable," advised Allis, "then if anything happens Lucretia we can start Lauzanne."

The Trainer laughed in good-natured derision. "That wouldn't do much good; we'd be out of the frying pan into the fire; we'd be just that much more money out for jockey an' startin' fees; he'd oughter been struck out on the first of January to save fifty dollars, but I guess you all had your troubles about that time an' wasn't thinkin' of declarations."

"It may have been luck; if Lauzanne would only try, something tells me he'd win," contended the girl.

"And somethin' tells me he wouldn't try a yard," answered Dixon, in good-humored opposition. "But I don't think it'll make no difference in the odds we get whether we back the stable or Lucretia alone; they won't take no stock in the Chestnut's prospects."

So Dixon made a little pilgrimage among the pencilers. He was somewhat dismayed and greatly astonished that these gentry also had a somewhat rosy opinion of Lucretia's chances. Her good gallop in the Brooklyn Handicap had been observed by other eyes than Crane's. Ten to one was the best offer he could get.

Dixon was remonstrating with a bookmaker, Ulmer, when the latter answered, "Ten's the best I'll lay—I'd rather take it myself; in fact, I have backed your mare because I think she's got a great chance; she'll be at fours race day. But I'll give you a tip—it's my game to see the owner's money on," and he winked at the Trainer as much as to say, "I'll feel happier about it if we're both in the same boat."

"It'll be on, sure thing, if I can get a decent price."

"Well, you go to Cherub Faust; he'll lay you longer odds. I put my bit on with him at twelve, see? If I didn't know that you an' Porter was always on the straight I'd a-thought there was somethin' doin', an' Faust was next it, stretchin' the odds that way. How's the mare doin'—is she none the worse?" Ullmer asked, a suspicious thought crossing his mind.

"We're backin' her—an' money talks," said Dixon, with quiet assurance.

"Well, Faust is wise to somethin'—he stands in with Langdon, an' I suppose they think they've got a cinch in The Dutchman. Yes, that must be it," he added, reflectively; "they made a killin' over Diablo, an' likely

they got a good line on The Dutchman through him in a trial. But a three-year-old mare that runs as prominent in the big Handicap as Lucretia did, will take a lot of beatin'. She's good enough for my money."

Thanking him, Dixon found Faust, and asked of him a quotation against Porter's stable.

"Twelve is the best I can do," answered the Cherub.

"I'll take fifteen to one," declared Dixon.

"Can't lay it; some of the talent—men as doesn't make no mistake, is takin' twelve to one in my book fast as I open my mouth."

"I want fifteen," replied Dixon, doggedly. "Surely the owner is entitled to a shade the best of it."

"What's the size of your bet?" queried the Cherub.

"If you lay me fifteen, I'll take it to a thousand."

"But you want it ag'in' the stable, an' you've two in; with two horses twelve is a long price."

"I'm takin' it against the stable just because it's the usual thing to couple it in the bettin'. It's a million to one against Lauzanne's starting if Lucretia keeps well."

Faust gave a little start and searched Dixon's face, furtively. The Trainer's stolid look reassured him, and in a most sudden burst of generosity he said: "Well, I'll stretch a point for you, Dixon. Your boss is up ag'in' a frost good and hard. I'll lay you fifteen thousand to one ag'in' the stable, an' if Lauzanne wins you'll buy me a nice tie-pin."

His round, fat sides heaved spasmodically with suppressed merriment at the idea of Lauzanne in the Brooklyn Derby.

"They must have a pretty good opinion of The Dutch-

man," Dixon thought, as he moved away after concluding the bet. "I'm naturally suspicious of that gang when they get frisky with their money. It's a bit like I've heard about the Sultan of Turkey always givin' a present to a man before cutting his head off."

The Trainer told Allis what he had done. He even spoke of his distrust at finding Faust laying longer odds against their mare than the other bookmakers. "But I don't see what they can do," he said, reflectively, studying the grass at his feet, his brow quite wrinkled in deep thought. "The mare's well, and we can trust the boy this time, I think."

"Yes, you can trust Redpath," affirmed Allis, decisively. "If Faust is in with Langdon, as you say, it just means that they're goin' on their luck, and think their colt, The Dutchman, can't lose."

"It must be that," concurred the Trainer, but in a hesitating tone that showed he was not more than half satisfied.

"You backed the stable?" queried Allis, as an afterthought.

"Yes, an' Lauzanne'll have a chance to-day to show whether he's worth the pencil that wrote his name beside Lucretia's."

"You are starting him to-day? I had almost forgotten that he was entered."

"Yes, it'll give him a fair trial—it's a mile, an' there ain't no good horses, that is, stake horses, in the race. I'll put Redpath up on him, an' you might have a talk with the boy, if you like. You're onto Lauzanne's notions better'n I am."

Allis gave Jockey Redpath the benefit of her knowledge of Lauzanne's peculiarities.

"I'm afraid he won't take kindly to you," she said, regretfully; "he's as notional as most of his sire's line. But if he won't try he won't, and the more you fight him the sulkier he'll get. I wish I could ride him myself," she added, playfully; then fearing that she had hurt the boy's feelings by discounting his ability, added, hastily: "I'm afraid I've spoiled Lauzanne; he has taken a liking to me, and I've learned how to make him think he's having his own way when he's really doing just what I want him to do."

Redpath's admiration for Allis Porter was limited to his admiration for her as a young lady. Being young, and a jockey, he naturally had notions; and a very prominent, all-absorbing notion was that he could manage his mount in a race much better than most boys. Constrained to silent acquiescence by respect for Allis, he assured himself, mentally, that, in the race his experience and readiness of judgment would render him far better service than orders—perhaps prompted by a sentimental regard for Lauzanne.

The Chestnut was a slow beginner; that was a trait which even Allis's seductive handling had failed to eradicate.

When the starter sent Lauzanne off trailing behind the other seven runners in the race that afternoon, Redpath made a faint essay, experimentally, to hold to Allis's orders, by patiently nestling over the Chestnut's strong withers in a vain hope that his mount would speedily seek to overtake the leaders. But evidently Lauzanne had no such intention; he seemed quite satisfied with things as they were. That the horses galloping so frantically in front interested him slightly was evidenced by his cocked ears; but beyond that he

might as well have been the starter's hack bringing that gentleman along placidly in the rear.

"Just as I thought," muttered the boy; "this skate's kiddin' me just as he does the gal. He's a lazy brute—it's the bud he wants."

Convinced that he was right, and that his orders were all wrong, the jockey asserted himself. He proceeded to ride Lauzanne most energetically.

In the horse's mind this sort of thing was associated with unlimited punishment. It had always been that way in his two-year-old days; first, the general hustle—small legs and arms working with concentric swing; then the impatient admonishment of fierce-jabbing spurs; and finally the welt-raising cut of a vicious, unreasoning whip. It was not a pleasurable prospect; and at the first shake-up, Lauzanne pictured it coming. All thoughts of overtaking the horses in front fled from his mind; it was the dreaded punishment that interested him most; figuratively, he humped his back against the anticipated onslaught.

Redpath felt the unmistakable sign of his horse sulking; and he promptly had recourse to the jockey's usual argument.

Sitting in the stand Allis saw, with a cry of dismay, Redpath's whip-hand go up. That Lauzanne had been trailing six lengths behind the others had not bothered her in the slightest—it was his true method; his work would be done in the stretch when the others were tiring, if at all.

"If the boy will only sit still—only have patience," she had been saying to herself, just before she saw the flash of a whip in the sunlight; and then she just moaned. "It's all over; we are beaten again. Every-

thing is against us—everybody is against us," she cried, bitterly; "will good fortune never come father's way?"

By the time the horses had swung into the stretch, and Lauzanne had not in the slightest improved his position, it dawned upon Redpath that his efforts were productive of no good, so he desisted. But his move had cost the Porters whatever chance they might have had. Left to himself, Lauzanne undertook an investigating gallop on his own account. Too much ground had been lost to be made up at that late stage, but he came up the straight in gallant style, wearing down the leaders until he finished close up among the unplaced horses.

Allis allowed no word of reproach to escape her when Redpath spoke of Lauzanne's sulky temper. It would do no good—it would be like crying over spilt milk. The boy was to ride Lucretia in the Derby; he was on good terms with the mare; and to chide him for the ride on Lauzanne would but destroy his confidence in himself for the other race.

"I'm afraid the Chestnut's a bad actor," Dixon said to Allis, after the race. "We'll never do no good with him. If he couldn't beat that lot he's not worth his feed bill."

"He would have won had I been on his back," declared the girl, loyally.

"That's no good, Miss; you can't ride him, you see. We've just got one peg to hang our hat on—that's Lucretia."

Lauzanne's showing in this race was a great disappointment to Allis; she had hoped that his confidence in humanity had been restored. Physically he had undoubtedly improved; his legs had hardened and

smoothed down. In fact, his whole condition was perfect.

She still felt that if Redpath had followed her advice and allowed Lauzanne to run his own race he would have won. The race did not shake her confidence in the horse so much as in the possibility of getting any jockey to ride him in a quiescent manner. When it was impossible of Redpath, who was eager to please her, whom else could they look to? They might experiment, but while they were experimenting Lauzanne would be driven back into his old bad habits.

The next morning brought them fresh disaster; all that had gone before was as nothing compared with this new development in their run of thwarted endeavor.

Ned Carter had given Lucretia a vigorous exercise gallop over the Derby course. As Dixon led the mare through the paddock to a stall he suddenly bent down his head and took a sharp look at her nostrils; another stride and they were in the stall. The Trainer felt Lucretia's throat and ears; he put his hand over her heart, a look of anxious dismay on his usually stolid face.

"She coughed a little, sir, when I pulled her up," volunteered Carter, seeing Dixon's investigation.

"I'm afraid she's took cold," muttered Dixon. "Have you had her near any horses that's got the influenza?" he asked, looking inquiringly at Carter.

"She ain't been near nothing; I kept her away from everything, for fear she'd get a kick, or get run into."

"I hope to God it's nothin'," said the Trainer; and his voice was quite different from his usual rough tone. Then a sudden suspicion took possession of him. Faust's readiness to lay long odds against the mare had

haunted him like a foolish nightmare. Had there been foul play? The mare couldn't have taken a cold—they had been so careful of her; there had been no rain for ten days; she hadn't got wet. No, it couldn't be cold. But she undoubtedly had fever. A sickening conviction came that it was the dreaded influenza.

That morning was the first time she had coughed, so Faust could not have known of her approaching illness, unless he had been the cause of it.

The Trainer pursued his investigation among the stable lads. When he asked Finn if he had noticed anything unusual about the mare, the boy declared most emphatically that he had not. Then, suddenly remembering an incident he had taken at the time to be of little import, he said: "Two mornin's ago when I opened her stall and she poked her head out, I noticed a little scum in her nose; but I thought it was dust. I wiped it out, and there was nuthin' more come that I could see."

"What's the row?" asked Mike Gaynor, as he joined Dixon.

When the details were explained to him Mike declared, emphatically, that some one had got at the mare. Taking Dixon to one side, he said: "It's that divil on wheels, Shandy; ye can bet yer sweet loife on that. I've been layin' for that crook; he cut Diablo's bridle an' t'rew th' ould man; an' he done this job, too."

"But how could he get at her?" queried the Trainer. "The stable's been locked; an' Finn and Carter was sleepin' in the saddle room."

"That divil could go where a sparrer could. How did he git in to cut th' bridle rein—t'rough a manure window no bigger'n your hat. He done that, as I know."

"Well, if the mare's got it we're in the soup. Have you seen Miss Porter about, Mike?"

"I did a minute ago; I'll pass the word ye want to see her—here she comes now. I'll skip. Damn if I want to see them gray eyes when ye tell about the little mare. It'll just break her heart; that's what it'll do. An' maybe I wouldn't break the back av the devil as put up this dirty job. It isn't Shandy that's as much to blame as the blackguard that worked him."

Dixon ran over in his mind many contorted ways of breaking the news to Allis, and finished up by blurting out: "The mare's coughin' this mornin', Miss; I hope it ain't nothin', but I'm afraid she's in for a sick spell."

Coming to the course, the girl had allowed rosy hope to tint the gray gloom of the many defeats until she had worked herself into a happy mood. Lucretia's win would put everything right; even her father, relieved of financial worry, would improve. The bright morning seemed to whisper of victory; Lucretia would surely win. It was not within the laws of fate that they should go on forever and ever having bad luck. She had come to have a reassuring look at the grand little mare that was to turn the tide of all their evil fortune. The Trainer's words, "The mare's coughin'," struck a chill to her heart. She could not speak—the misery was too great—but stood dejectedly listening while Dixon spoke of his suspicions of foul play.

What villains there were in the world, the girl thought; for a man to lay them odds against their horse, knowing that she had been poisoned, was a hundred times worse than stealing the money from their pockets.

"I don't suppose we'll ever be able to prove it," declared Dixon, regretfully; "but that doesn't matter so much as the mare being done for; we're out of it now good and strong. If we'd known it two days ago we might a-saved the money, but we've burned up a thousand."

"We'll have to start Lauzanne," said Allis, taking a brave pull at herself, and speaking with decision.

"We might send him to the post, but that's all the good it'll do us, I'm feared."

"I've seen him do a great gallop," contended Allis.

"He did it for you, but he won't do it for nobody else. There ain't no boy ridin' can make him go fast enough for a live funeral. But we'll start him, an' I'll speak to Redpath about takin' the mount."

Allis was thinking very fast; her head, with its great wealth of black hair, drooped low in heavy meditation.

"Don't engage him just yet, Dixon," she said, looking up suddenly, the shadow of a new resolve in her gray eyes; "I'll talk it over with you when we go back to the house. I'm thinking of something, but I don't want to speak of it just now—let me think it over a little."

Dixon was deep in thought, too, as he went back to his own stables. "We haven't got a million to one chance," he was muttering; "the money's burned up, an' the race is dead to the world, as far as we're concerned."

That Allis could evolve any plan to lift them out of their Slough of Despond he felt was quite impossible; but at any rate he got a distinct shock when, a little later, a slight-formed girl, with gray eyes, set large and

full in a dark face, declared to him that she was going to ride Lauzanne in the Derby herself.

"My God, Miss!" the Trainer exclaimed, "you can't do it. What would people say—what would your mother say?"

"People will say the race was well ridden if I'm any judge, and mother won't be interested enough to know whether Lucretia was hitched to a buggy in the Derby or not."

"But the Judge would never allow a girl—"

"There'll be no *girl* in it;" and Allis explained, in minute detail the result of her deep cogitation.

"It won't work; you never could do it," objected Dixon, with despondent conviction. "That big head of hair would give you dead away."

"The head of hair won't be in evidence; it will be lying in my trunk, waiting to be made up into a wig after we've won."

"No, no; it won't do," the Trainer reiterated; "everybody'd know you, an' there'd be a fine shindy. I believe you could ride the horse right enough, an' if he has a chance on earth you'd get it out of him. But give up the idea, everybody'd know you."

The girl pleaded, but Dixon was obdurate. He did not contend for an instant that she was not capable of riding the horse,—only in a race with many jockeys she would find it different from riding a trial gallop,—but his main objection was that she'd be known.

Allis closed the discussion by saying that she was going home to encourage her father a little over the mare's defeat in the Handicap, and made Dixon promise not to engage Redpath for Lauzanne till her return next morning.

"He can't take another mount," she said, "because he's retained for Lucretia, and we haven't declared her out yet."

"I'm hopin' we may not have to," remarked Dixon. "Anyway, there's no hurry about switchin' the boy onto Lauzanne, so we'll settle that when you come back."

XXX

ALLIS's visit to Ringwood was a flying one. Filial devotion to her father had been one motive, but not the only one. Her brother Alan's wardrobe received a visitation from hands not too well acquainted with the intricacies of its make-up.

John Porter was undoubtedly brightened by the daughter's visit. Lucretia's defeat in the Handicap had increased his despondency. To prepare him gradually for further reverses Allis intimated, rather than asserted, that Lucretia might possibly have a slight cold—Dixon wasn't sure; but they were going to run Lauzanne also. Like the Trainer, her father had but a very poor opinion of the Chestnut's powers in any other hands but in that of the girl's.

"Who'll ride him?" he asked, petulantly. "It seems you can't trust any of the boys now-a-days. If they're not pin-headed, they're crooked as a corkscrew. Crane tells me that Redpath didn't ride Lucretia out in the Handicap, and whether he rides the mare or Lauzanne it seems all one—we'll get beat anyway."

"Another boy will have the mount on Lauzanne," Allis answered.

"What difference will that make? You can't trust him."

"You can trust this boy, father, as you might your own son, Alan."

"I don't know about that. Alan in the bank is

all right, but Alan as a jockey would be a different thing."

"Father, you would trust me, wouldn't you?"

"I guess I would, in the tightest corner ever was chiseled out."

"Well, you can trust the jockey that's going to ride Lauzanne just as much. I know him, and he's all right. He's been riding Lauzanne some, and the horse likes him."

"It's all Lauzanne," objected Porter, the discussion having thrown him into a petulant mood. "Is Lucretia that bad—is she sick?"

"She galloped to-day," answered the girl, evasively. "But if anything happens her we're going to win with the horse. Just think of that, father, and cheer up. Dixon has backed the stable to win a lot of money, enough to—enough to—well, to wipe out all these little things that are bothering you, dad."

She leaned over and kissed her father in a hopeful, pretty way. The contact of her brave lips drove a magnetic flow of confidence into the man. "You're a brick, little woman, if ever there was one. Just a tiny bunch of pluck, ain't you, girl? And, Allis," he continued, "if you don't win the Derby, come and tell me about it yourself, won't you? You're sure to have some other scheme for bracing me up. I'm just a worthless hulk, sitting here in the house a cripple while you fight the battles. Perhaps Providence, as your mother says, will see you through your hard task."

"I won't come and tell you that we've lost, dad; I'll come and tell you that we've won; and then we'll all have the biggest kind of a blow-out right here in the house. We'll have a champagne supper, with cider for cham-

pagne, eh, dad? Alan, and Dixon, and old Mike, and perhaps we'll even bring Lauzanne in for the nuts and raisins at desert."

"And the Rev. Dolman,—you've left him out," added the father.

They were both laughing. Just a tiny little ray of sunshine had dispelled all the gloom for a minute.

"Now I must go back to my horses," declared Allis, with another kiss. "Good-bye, dad—cheer up;" and as she went up to her room the smile of hope vanished from her lips, and in its place came one of firm, dogged resolve. Allis needed much determination before she had accomplished the task she had set herself—before she stood in front of a mirror, arrayed in the purple and fine linen of her brother. She had thought Alan small, and he was for a boy, but his clothes bore a terribly suggestive impression of misfit—they hung loose.

Mentally thanking the fashion which condoned it, she turned the trousers up at the bottom. "I'll use my scissors and needle on them to-night," she said, ruthlessly. Thank goodness, the jockeys are all little chaps, and the racing clothes will fit better.

The coat was of summer wear, therefore somewhat close-fitting for Alan; but why did it hang so loosely on her? She was sure her brother was not so much bigger. A little thought given to this question of foreign apparel brought a possible solution. The undergarments she had tumbled about in her search were much heavier than her own. Her crusade had its side of comedy; she chuckled as, muttering, "In for a penny, in for a pound," she reincarnated herself completely, so far as outward adornment was concerned. Then she examined herself critically in the glass. The mirror declared she was a passable

counterfeit of her brother; all but the glorious crown of luxuriant hair. Perhaps she had better leave it as it was until she had met with the approval of Dixon—the terrible sacrifice might be for nothing. She wavered only for an instant—no half measure would do. "In for a penny, in for a pound." The slightest weakness in carrying out her bold plan might cause it to fail.

Twice she took up a pair of scissors, and each time laid them down again, wondering if it were little short of a madcap freak; then, shrinking from the grinding hiss of the cutting blades, she clipped with feverish haste the hair that had been her pride. It was a difficult task, and but a rough job at best when finished, but the change in her appearance was marvelous; the metamorphosis, so successful, almost drowned the lingering regret. She drew a cap over her shorn head, packed her own garments and a few of her brother's in a large bag, buttoned her newmarket coat tight up to her throat, and once more surveyed herself in the glass. From head to foot she was ready. Ah, the truthful glass betrayed the weak point in her armor—the boots. In an instant she had exchanged them for a pair of Alan's. Now she was ready to pass her mother as Allis in her own long cloak, and appear before Dixon without it as a boy. That was her clever little scheme.

Before going up to her room she had asked that the stableman might be at the door with a buggy when she came down, to take her to the station. When she descended he was waiting.

"I'm taking some clothes back with me, mother," she said. "Let Thomas bring the bag down, please."

"You're getting dreadfully mannish in your appearance, daughter; it's that cap."

"I have to wear something like this about in the open," answered Allis.

"But for traveling, girl, it seems out of place. Let me put a hat on you. I declare I thought it was Alan when you came into the room."

"I can't wait; this will do. I must be off to catch my train. Good-bye, mother; wish me good luck," and she hurried out and took her seat in the buggy.

XXXI

Some hours later Dixon, sitting in his cottage, oppressed by the misfortune that had come to his stable, heard a knock at the door. When he opened it a neatly dressed, slim youth stepped into the uncertain light that stretched out reluctantly from a rather unfit lamp on the center table.

"Is this Mr. Dixon?" the boy's voice piped modestly.

"Yes, lad, it is. Will you sit down?"

The boy removed his cap, took the proffered chair, and said somewhat hesitatingly, "I heard you wanted a riding boy."

Well, I do, an' I don't. I don't know as I said I did, but,"—and he scanned the little figure closely,—"if I could get a decent lightweight that hadn't the hands of a blacksmith, an' the morals of a burglar, I might give him a trial. Did you ever do any ridin'—what stable was you in?"

"I've rode a good deal," answered the little visitor, ignoring the second half of the question.

"What's your name?"

"Mayne."

"Main what?"

"Al Mayne," the other replied.

"Well, s'posin' you show up at the course paddocks to-morrow mornin' early, an' I'll see you shape on a horse. D'you live about here—can you bring your father, so if I like your style we can have things fixed proper?"

The boy's face appealed to Dixon as being an honest one. Evidently the lad was not a street gamin, a tough. If he had hands—the head promised well—and could sit a horse, he might be a find. A good boy was rarer than a good horse, and of more actual value.

"I guess I'll stay here to-night so as to be ready for the mornin'," said the caller, to Dixon's astonishment; and then the little fellow broke into a silvery laugh.

"By Jimminy! If it isn't—well, I give in, Miss Allis, you fooled me."

"Can I ride Lauzanne now?" the girl asked, and her voice choked a little—it might have been the nervous excitement, or thankfulness at the success of her plan in this its first stage.

"Do they know at home?" the Trainer asked.

"No, nobody is to know but you, Mr. Dixon—you and Mrs. Dixon."

This suggested a thought to the Trainer. "The good wife's at work in the kitchen; I'll bring her in. Perhaps she'd like to hire a help," and he chuckled as he opened a door and called, "Come here for a minute. This is a boy"—he turned his head away—"I'm takin' on for Lauzanne."

Oh," said Mrs. Dixon. Then, with severe politeness, "Good evenin', young man."

The two figures in male attire broke into a laugh simultaneously. The good lady, oblivious to the humorous side of her greeting, flushed in anger. "Appears to be mighty funny," she said. "What's the joke?"

"Oh, nuthin'," replied the husband, speaking hastily. "Can you give the lad a bed? He wants to bunk here."

"Why, Andy, you know I can't. There's only Miss Allis's room."

"Give her—him that."

"Are you crazy, Andy?"

"It's too bad, Mrs. Dixon; I sha'n't let your husband tease you any more. I am Allis; but I'm glad you didn't know."

"Oh, Miss Allis, where's your beautiful hair gone? Surely you didn't cut that off just for a joke?"

Then she was taken fully into their confidence; and before Allis retired Dixon had been quite won over to the plan of Allis's endeavor.

In the morning the Trainer asked the girl whether she would ride Lauzanne a working gallop to get accustomed to the new order of things, or would she just wait until race day and take her place in the saddle then.

"I'm afraid Mike'll spot you," he said—"even Carter may."

"I'll ride to-day," declared Allis; "I musn't take any chances of losing this race through my inexperience. Even Lauzanne will hardly know me, I'm afraid. Mike and Carter needn't see much of me—I can slip away as soon as I've ridden the gallop."

"Here's a boy's sweater, then," said Dixon; "the collar'll half hide your face. I'll get a pair of ridin' breeches an' boots for you by to-morrow. The little mare's in for it sure," he added; "her legs are swellin', an' she's off her feed—just nibbles at a carrot. I feel as bad as if it was a child that was sick, she's that gentle. She can't start, an' I'll just tell Redpath that he can take another mount if he gets it. You're still bound to ride the Chestnut?" he asked, by way of assurance.

"Yes, I am."

"Well, we'll get five pounds off the weight for 'prentice allowance—that's somethin'. I'll arrange about a permit for you. What did you say your name was, mister?"

"Al Mayne, please, sir," this in the humble tone of a stable-boy.

"Well, Miss—Al, I mean—you can carry Lauzanne around the course at nine o'clock sharp; then you'd better come back here an' rest up all day—lay low."

"A new boy, I'm tryin'," Dixon explained to Gaynor, after he lifted a little lad to Lauzanne's back at the paddock gate, and they stood watching the big Chestnut swing along with his usual sluggish stride.

"He's got good hands," said Mike, critically, "though he seems a bit awkward in the saddle. Ye couldn't have a better trial horse fer a new b'y. If Lauzanne's satisfied with him he can roide onythin'."

When Allis, who was now Al Mayne, the boy, came around and back to the paddock, she slipped quietly from the horse, loitered carelessly about for a few minutes, and then made her way back to Dixon's quarters. Nobody had paid any attention to the modest little boy. Riding lads were as plentiful as sparrows; one more or less called for no comment, no investigation. Even Mike lost interest in the new boy in wondering why Miss Allis had not made her usual appearance.

"How did the horse like it?" Dixon asked of the girl when he returned home.

"Oh, he knew. I whispered in his ear as we cantered along, and he'll be all right—he'll keep my secret."

"Well, I think he's due for a pipe opener to-morrow. It's just three days till the Derby, an' we've got to give him a strong workout. Besides, it'll put you next what

you've got to do in the race. To-morrow mornin' you had better canter him just slow around once, an' then send him a full mile-an'-a-quarter as though there was money hung up for it. I'll catch his time, an' we'll get wise to what he can do."

This programme was carried out; and as Dixon looked thrice at his watch after the gallop to make sure that he was not mistaken in the time, 2:11, he began to wonder if, after all, the girl was not nearly right in her prophetic hope that the despised Lauzanne would win the Brooklyn Derby.

"He can move; he surprised me," the Trainer said to Allis as she dismounted. "He's not blown, either; he's as fresh as a daisy. Gad! we'll do those blackguards up yet, I believe."

The gallop had attracted Mike's attention also. As Allis moved away he called after her, "I say, b'y, hould on a minute. What's yer name, ennyway?"

"Al," answered the small voice.

"Well, by me faith, ye didn't put up no bad roide. Ye handled that horse foine. Don't run away, lad," he added, hurrying after the retreating Allis.

Before she could escape him, he had her by the arm, and turned about face to face. Even then he didn't recognize her, for Allis had taken a most subtle precaution in her make-up. The delicate olive of her cheeks was hidden under a more than liberal allowance of good agricultural cosmetique. It had been well rubbed in, too, made of a plastic adherence by the addition of mucilage.

"Lord, what a doirty face!" exclaimed Mike. "But ye kin ride, b'y; so dirt don't count; clean ridin's the thing."

If Allis hadn't laughed in his face, being full of the

happiness of hope, Mike would not have recognized her —even then he didn't hit it off quite right.

"Alan Porter!" he gasped. "Bot' t'umbs up! Is it ye, b'y?"

"Hush!" and a small warning finger was held up.

"Don't fear, b'y, that I'll give it away. Mum's the word wit' me. But I'm dahmned if I t'ought ye could roide like that. It's jus' in the breed, that's what it is; ye take to it as natural as ducks—" Mike had a habit of springing half-finished sentences on his friends. "Yer father could roide afore ye; none better, an' Miss Allis can sit a horse foiner nor any b'y as isn't a top-notcher. But this beats me, t'umbs up, if it doesn't. I onderstand," he continued, as Allis showed an inclination to travel, "ye don't want the push to get on to ye. They won't, nayther—what did ye say yer name was, sonny?"

"Al Mayne."

"Ye'r a good b'y, Al. I hope Dixon lets ye roide the Chestnut in the Derby. I'd give wan av me legs—an' I needs 'em bot'—to see ye beat out that gang av highway robbers that got at the mare. They'll not git at the Chestnut, for I'll slape in the stall meself."

As Allis moved away, Mike stood watching the neat figure.

"That's the game, eh?" he muttered to himself; "the gal don't trust Redpath no more'n I do; palaver don't cut no ice wit' her. The b'y didn't finish on Lucretia, an' that's all there is to it. But how's Alan goin' to turn the trick in a big field of rough ridin' b'ys? If it was the gurl herself—" a sudden brilliant idea threw its strong light through Mike's brain pan. He took a dozen quick shuffling steps after Allis, then stopped as suddenly

as he had started. "Mother a' Moses! but I believe it's the gurl; that's why the Chestnut galloped as if he had her on his back. Jasus! he had. Ph-e-e-w-w!" he whistled, a look of intense admiration sweeping over his leather-like face. "Bot' t'umbs! if that isn't pluck. There isn't a soul but meself'll git ontill it, an' she all but fooled me."

. . .

XXXII

THE news that Lucretia was sick had got about. The Porter's stable traveled out in the betting for the Brooklyn Derby until a backer—if there had been one—could have written his own price, and got it.

Langdon had informed Crane of this change in their favor, though he said nothing about the deal with Shandy which had brought about the poisoning of the mare.

"I'm sorry that Porter's mare has gone wrong," Crane said. "I think we would have won anyway, but it'll just about ruin them."

Figuratively, Langdon closed one eye and winked to himself. Crane must know that it was his implied desires that had led up to the stopping of Lucretia. Langdon thought Crane just about the most complete hypocrite he'd ever met; that preacher face of his could look honorably pious while its owner raked in a cool forty thousand over the Trainer's dirty work. However, that cut no figure, it was his ten thousand dollars Langdon was after.

Just as they thought they had destroyed the chances of their strongest opponent, came a new disturbing feature. Other eyes than Dixon's has seen Lauzanne's strong gallop; other watchers than his had ticked off the extraordinary good time, 2:11 for the mile and a quarter, with the horse seemingly running well within himself, never urged a foot of the journey, and finishing strong,

was certainly almost good enough to warrant his winning.

This information had been brought to Langdon, but he also had observed the gallop. And the same boy was to ride Lauzanne in the race, he understood, for Redpath had been released, and was looking for another mount. It wasn't in the natural order of things that one small stable would have in it two horses good enough to win the Derby, especially when one of them was a cast-off; but there was the gallop; time, like figures, didn't lie, not often; and as he thought of it Langdon admitted that he had never seen such an improvement in a horse as had been made in Lauzanne. Shandy had told him that it was Miss Porter's doing, that she had cured him of his sulky moods; the gallop Langdon had witnessed seemed to bear out the truth of this. What was he to do? They couldn't repeat the trick they had played on Lucretia. The Dutchman might win; he had worked the full Derby distance, a mile and a half, in 2:45, nearly all out at the finish. Lauzanne's gallop was only a mile and a quarter; he might not be able to stay the additional quarter. But there was ten thousand dollars at stake—for Langdon. He sought to discover the identity of Lauzanne's rider; but nobody knew him—Dixon had picked him up somewhere. Perhaps he could be got at; that would simplify matters greatly.

The morning after her fast work on Lauzanne, Allis, draped as she was into the personification of Al Mayne, arrived at the course before their horses. As she was leaning over the paddock rail waiting for Lauzanne to come, Langdon, who had evidently determined upon a course of action, sauntered up carelessly to the girl and commenced to talk. After a free preliminary observa-

tion he said, "You're the boy that's ridin' for Andy Dixon, ain't you?"

The small figure nodded its head.

"I seen you gallop that Chestnut yesterday. Where you been ridin'—you're a stranger here, I reckon?"

"Out West," answered Allis, at a hazard.

"Oh, San Francisco, eh? Are you engaged to Dixon?"

"I'm just on trial."

"Goin' to ride the Chestnut in the race?"

Again the boy nodded; under the circumstances it wasn't wise to trust too much to speech.

"He ain't no good—he's a bad horse. I guess I've got the winner of that race in my stable. If he wins, I'd like to sign you for a year. I like the way you ride. I ain't got no good lightweight. I might give you a thousand for a contract, an' losin' and winnin' mounts when you had a leg up. How do you like ridin' for Dixon?" he continued, the little chap not answering his observations.

"I ain't goin' to ride no more for him after this race," answered the other, quite truthfully enough, but possessed of a curiosity to discover the extent of the other's villainy.

"I don't blame you. He's no good; he don't never give his boys a chance. If you win on the Chestnut, like as not they'll just give you the winnin' mount. That ain't no good to a boy. They ain't got no money, that's why. The owner of my candidate, The Dutchman, he's a rich man, an' won't think nothin' of givin' a retainer of a thousand if we won this race. That'll mean The Dutchman's a good horse, and we'll want a good light boy to ride him, see?"

Allis did see. Langdon was diplomatically giving her

as Al Mayne to understand that if she threw the race on Lauzanne, she would get a place in their stable at a retainer of a thousand dollars.

"We can afford it if we win the race," he continued, "for we stand a big stake. Come and see me any time you like to talk this over."

After he had gone, just as Allis was leaving the rail, she was again accosted; this time by Shandy. She trembled an instant, fearing that the small red-lidded ferret eyes would discover her identity. But the boy was too intent on trying to secure his ill-earned five hundred dollars to think of anything else.

"Good mornin', boy," he said, cheerily. "I used to be in Dixon's stable. It's hell; and he's a swipe. I see my boss talkin' to you just now. Did he put you next a good thing?"

Allis nodded her head, knowingly.

"He's all right. So's the other one—the guy as has got the mun; he's got a bank full of it. I'm on to him; his name's Crane—"

Allis started.

"You don't know him," continued the imp; "he's too slick to go messin' about. But if the old man promised you anything, see, God blast me, you'll git it. Not like that other skin-flint hole where you don't git nothin'. I stand in five hundred if our horse wins the Derby."

"Do you ride him?" asked Al Mayne.

"Ride nothin'. I don't have to. I've did my job already."

"I don't believe they'll give you five hundred for nothin'," said Allis, doubtingly, knowing that the boy's obstinate nature, if he were crossed, would probably drive him into further explanation.

"Say, you're a stiff. What'd the ole man want you to do—pull Lauzanne?"

Allis nodded.

"I knowed it. What was the use of stoppin' the mare an' let the Chestnut spoil the job?"

"Is that what you get the five hundred for?" asked Allis, a sudden suspicion forcing itself upon her.

"Say, what d' you take me fer, a flat car? But she's sick, ain't she? An' you jes' take care of the Chestnut now, an' I'll give you a hundred out of my five, God bli' me if I don't."

As he spoke Shandy looked hastily about to see that no one was listening, then he continued: "If you give me the double cross an' peach, I'll split yer head open." His small eyes blazed with venomous fury. "Besides, it won't do no good, my word's as good as yours. But I'll give you the hundred, s'help me God! I will, if you don't ride the Chestnut out. Mum's the word," he added, bolting suddenly, for Dixon had entered the paddock with his horses.

With the horses also came Mike Gaynor. While their blankets were being taken off and saddles adjusted, he came over to Allis. There was a suppressed twinkle of subverted knowledge in his weather-beaten eyes.

"Good mornin', Al," he said, nodding in a very dignified manner, and putting a strong accent on the name.

Now Mike had determined to keep from the girl the fact that he had penetrated her disguise. With proper Irish gallantry, crude as it might be in its expression, but delicate enough in its motive, he reasoned that his knowledge might make her uncomfortable.

"I see that fly-by-night divil Shandy talkin' to ye as I come in. What new mischief is he up to now?"

"He wants me to pull Lauzanne."

"He ain't got no gall, has he? That come from headquarters; it's Langdon put him up to that."

"He was talkin' to me, too."

"I t'ought he would be. But he didn't know ye, Miss Allis—"

Heavens! It was out. Mike's sun-tanned face turned brick-red; he could have bitten off his unruly Irish tongue. The girl stared at him helplessly, her cheeks, that were scarlet, tingling under the hot rush of blood.

"There ye are, an' believe me, I didn't mean it. I was goin' to keep me mouth shut, but I never could do that."

"You knew then, yesterday?"

"Indade I didn't, an' that's a good sign to ye nobody'll know. But whin I t'ought wit' meself I knowed that Alan couldn't ride Lauzanne the way ye did; an' ye didn't deny ye was him, an' if ye wasn't him ye must be yerself, see?" which more or less lucid explanation seemed to relieve Mike's mind mightily. "I think ye're jes doin' roight, Miss—Al, I mean; I must get used to that name; s'help me, I believe ye'll win on the Chestnut —that gallop was good enough."

"Do you think I can do it, Mike, among all those jockeys?"

"Sure thing, ye can, A—Al, me b'y; he won't need no ridin' in yer hands; all ye'll have to do is sit still an' keep him straight. He'll win the race in the stretch, an' there won't be many there to bother—they'll all be beat off. Now, it's a good thing that I do know about this, for I'll just kape close to ye an' kape any wan that's likely to spot ye away, if I have to knock him down."

Mike had worked himself up to a fine frenzy of pro-

jected endeavor; he cast about for further services he could render his admired mistress.

"An' ye know Carson the starter; he's jes the loveliest Irishman; there isn't a b'y on earth could git an inch the best av it from him on a start, not if they was to give him gold enough to weigh a horse down. But I'll jes' tip him the wink that ye'r a gurl, and—"

"Mike, what are you saying? Do you mean to ruin everything?"

The rosy hue of eager joyousness that had crept into Gaynor's sun-tanned face vanished; his jaw drooped, and a pathetic look of sheepish apology followed.

"That's so," he ejaculated, mournfully; "bot' t'umbs up! but it's a pity. Carson's an Irish gintleman, an' if I could till him ye was a gurl, he'd knock the head plumb off any b'y that 'ud bother ye. Ye'd git away well, too."

Then the girl told Mike all that Shandy and Langdon had said. It only confirmed Mike's opinion that between them they had poisoned Lucretia. He felt that with a little more evidence he would be able to prove both crimes—the one with Diablo and the one with Lucretia.

The Brooklyn Derby was to be run the next day. Allis was glad that it was so near; she dreaded discovery. She was like a hunted hare, dodging everyone she fancied might discover her identity. She would have to run the gauntlet of many eyes while weighing for the race, and at the time of going out; even when she returned, especially if she won. But in the excitement over the race, people would not have time to devote to a strange jockey's visage. She could quite smear her face with dirt, for that seemed a natural condition where boys were riding perhaps several races in one afternoon. The

Do you think I can do it, Mike, among all those jockeys?

jockey cap with its big peak well pulled down over her head would add materially to her disguise. Mike would fetch and carry for her, so that she would be in evidence for very few minutes at most. Dixon even, opposed to the idea as he had been at first, now assured her quite confidently that nobody would make her out.

"It's the horses they look at," he said, "and the colors. An apprentice boy doesn't cut much ice, I can tell you. Why, I've been racin' for years," he went on with the intent of giving her confidence, "an' many a time I see a boy up on a horse that must have rode on the tracks over a hundred times, an' I can't name him to save my neck."

At any rate there was nothing more to do until she made the great endeavor, until she went to the track at the time set for the Brooklyn Derby, dressed in the blue jacket with the white stars of her father's racing colors; that was the plan adopted. A buggy, with Mike driving, would take her straight to the paddock quite in time for the race.

XXXIII

AFTER Crane left the money for Porter's note with Mortimer the latter took the three one-thousand-dollar bills, pinned them to the note, placed them in a cigar box and put the box away carefully in the bank safe, to remain there until the 14th of June, when it became due. Incidentally Mortimer mentioned this matter to Alan Porter.

Crane in writing to the cashier about other affairs of the bank touched upon the subject of Porter's obligation, stating that he had left the money with Mr. Mortimer to meet the note when it matured.

The day before the Derby, the 12th of the month, Alan asked his day's leave and got it. The cashier more readily granted Alan's request, as Crane had intimated in his letter that it would please him if the lad were to have a holiday.

Alan went up to New York that evening. Earlier in the day he somewhat hesitatingly confided to Mortimer that he had backed Lucretia when she was well and looked to have a good chance to win her race; now she was scratched, and his money was lost. Bearing in mind what Crane had said about The Dutchman's chances of winning, even with Lucretia in the race, he felt now that it appeared almost like a certainty for Crane's horse. If he could have a bet on The Dutchman he would surely recoup his losses. Alan explained all these racing matters very minutely and with great

earnestness to Mortimer, for the latter was quite unfamiliar with the science of race gambling. Having stated his predicament and hoped-for relief, as an excuse for so doing, he wound up by asking his companion for a loan of two hundred dollars.

Mortimer had little less horror of betting and its evil influence than Mrs. Porter, but under the circumstances he would perhaps have complied with the boy's request had he been provided with sufficient funds. As it was, he said: "I don't like the idea of lending you money to bet with, Alan; your mother wouldn't thank me for doing so; besides, if you lost it you'd feel uncomfortable owing me the money. At any rate, I haven't got it. I couldn't lend you two hundred, or half of it. I suppose I haven't got a hundred to my credit."

"Oh, never mind then," answered Alan, angrily, stiffening up, because of Mortimer's lecture.

"I'll lend you what I've got."

"I don't want it. I can get it some other place."

"You'd better take—"

"Take nothing—I don't want it."

"Very well, I'm sorry I can't oblige you. But take my advice and don't bet at all; it'll only get you into trouble."

"Thanks; I don't need your advice. I was a fool to ask you for the money."

"I say, Alan," began Mortimer, in a coaxing tone.

"Please don't 'Alan' me any more. I can get along without your money and without your friendship; I don't want either."

Mortimer remained silent. What was the use of angering the boy further? He would come to see that

he had meant it in good part, and would be all right in a day or two.

During the rest of the day Alan preserved a surly distance of manner, speaking to Mortimer only once—a constrained request for a bunch of keys in the latter's possession which unlocked some private drawers in the vault.

The next morning it suddenly occurred to Mortimer that Porter's note fell due that day—either that day or the next, he wasn't sure. The easiest way to settle the question was to look at the date on the note.

He stepped into the vault, took out the little cigar box, opened it, and as he handled the crisp papers a sudden shock of horror ran through his frame. One of the bills was gone; there were only two one-thousand-dollar notes left.

The discovery paralyzed him for an instant. He was responsible; the money had been left in his charge. Then he looked at the note; it matured the next day. All the money had been in the box the morning before, for he had looked at it. Only the cashier and Alan Porter knew that it was in the vault.

The whole dreadful truth came clearly to Mortimer's mind with absolute conviction. Alan, infatuated with the prospect of winning a large sum over The Dutchman, and failing to borrow from him, had taken the money.

The gravity of the situation calmed Mortimer, and his mind worked with a cool method that surprised him. Bit by bit he pieced it out. The boy, inconsistently enough, had reasoned that the money was his father's, and that he was only borrowing family property. No doubt he had felt sure of winning, and that he would be

back in time to replace the thousand before it was needed. This sophistical reasoning had, without doubt, tempted the lad to commit this—this—Mortimer felt a reluctance to bestow the proper name upon Alan's act, but undoubtedly it was stealing.

And if the boy lost the money, what would happen? He couldn't repay it; the shortage would be discovered and Allis's brother would be ruined, branded as a thief.

Mortimer would willingly put the money back himself for Allis's sake; but he hadn't it. What was he to do? If he could find Alan and force him to give up the stolen money he could yet save the boy. But Alan had gone to Gravesend.

Like an inspiration the thought came to Mortimer that he must go after him and get the money before it was lost. He shoved the box back in its place, and came out into the office.

It was half past ten by the clock. Luckily the cashier had not come yet. Mortimer's mind worked rapidly. He must make some excuse and get away; anything; he must even lie; if he saved the boy it would be justifiable. Why did not the cashier come, now that he was ready for him? Each minute seemed an age, with the honor of Allis's brother hanging in the balance. He would need money. He drew a check for a hundred dollars. A hasty inspection showed that he still had a trifle more than this amount to his credit. Why he took a hundred he hardly knew; fate seemed writing the check. He had barely finished when the cashier appeared. At once Mortimer spoke to him.

"I want leave of absence to-day, sir," he said, speaking hurriedly.

The cashier frowned in astonishment. "Impossible! We are short-handed with young Porter away."

"I'll be back in the morning," pleaded Mortimer. "My mother is very ill. I've opened up, and Mr. Cass can manage, I'm sure, if you'll let me go. I wouldn't ask it, but it's a matter of almost life and death." He had nearly said of honor.

Unwillingly the cashier consented. It probably meant extra work for him; he would certainly have to take a hand in the office routine. Theirs was not a busy bank, and that day was not likely to be a very pressing one, but still he would have to shoulder some of the labor.

Full of the terrible situation, Mortimer cared not who worked, so that he got away in time to save Allis's brother from himself. At last he was free. He almost ran to the station.

Looking from the window of the bank, the cashier seeing Mortimer's rapid pace, muttered: "I guess the poor man's mother is pretty bad; I'm glad I let him go. He's a good son to that mother of his."

At eleven o'clock Mortimer got a train for New York. During the wait at the station he had paced up and down the platform with nervous stride. A dozen times he looked at his watch—would he be too late? He had no idea how long it would take to reach Gravesend; he knew nothing of the race track's location. As the train whirled him through Emerson, where his mother lived, he could see the little drab cottage, and wondered pathetically what the good woman would say if she knew her son was going to a race meeting. At twelve he was in New York.

XXXIV

MORTIMER found that he could take an "L" train to the Bridge, and transfer there to another taking him direct to the course. At the Bridge he was thrust into a motley crowd, eager, expectant, full of joyous anticipation of assured good luck. He was but a tiny unit of this many-voiced throng; he drifted a speck on the bosom of the flood that poured into the waiting race train. He was tossed into a seat by the swirling tide, and as the train moved he looked at his fellow-passengers. There was a pleasant air of opulence all about him. Gold chains of fair prominence, diamonds of lustrous hue, decorated the always rotund figures. He fell to wondering why the men were all of a gross physique; why did the ladies wear dresses of such interminable variety of color; from whence came the money for this plethora of rich apparel?

The race literature that had come Mortimer's way had generally dealt with the unfortunate part of racing. Somehow he had got the impression that everybody lost money at it. He was sure Alan Porter had, also the father.

True, on the train were some bearing undeniable evidences of poverty; but not many. One man of this latter unfortunate aspect sat next him. His whole appearance was suggestive of the shady side of life. With the industry of a student he pored over a disheveled sporting paper for half an hour, then throwing it

under the seat he cast a furtive look at his neighbor, and presently said, "Dere'll be big fields to-day."

"That's too bad," Mortimer answered, through ignorance, thinking that the other referred to perhaps a considerable walk across country to reach the course.

"I like it," declared the man of sad drapery; "it means long odds if you're next somethin' good."

Mortimer confined his remarks to a brief "Oh!" for the other man might as well have been speaking Choctaw.

"Have you doped 'em out for de Derby?" asked the stranger.

Mortimer shook his head. Whatever it was it was connected with horse racing, and he felt sure that he hadn't done it.

"Well, I'll tell you somethin'—will you put down a good bet if I steer you straight?"

Mortimer was growing weary; his mind, troubled by the frightful disaster that threatened Allis's family, wanted to draw within itself and ponder deeply over a proper course of action; so he answered: "My dear sir, I'm afraid you're mistaken. I never bet on races. But I thank you for your kind offer."

The unwashed face looked at him in blank amazement, then it wrinkled in a mirthful laugh of derision. "What d' 'ell you goin' to Gravesend for, den? Blamed if I don't believe you dough—you look it. Say, is dat straight goods—did you never have a bet in your life?"

"Never did."

"Well, I'm damned! Say, I believe you've got de best of it, dough. Wish I'd never bucked ag'in' de bookies."

"Why don't you stop it now, then?"

"Say, pard, do you drink?"

"No."

"Smoke?"

"No."

A hopeless air of utter defeat came into the thin, sharp face. Its owner had been searching for a simile. He wanted to point a moral and he couldn't find it. The young man at his elbow was too immaculate. He tried to explain: "Racin's like any other locoed t'ing—it's like tobacco, or drink, or stealin' money out of a bank—"

Mortimer shivered. He had felt a moral superiority in denying the implied bad habits.

"It's like any of 'em," continued the ragged philosopher; "a guy starts simply as a kid, an' he gets de t'row-down. He takes a bracer at himself, and swears he'll give it de go-by, but he can't—not on your life."

Mortimer had read much about confidence men, and half expected that his self-imposed acquaintance would try to borrow money, but he was disillusionized presently.

"But de ring ain't broke Ole Bill yet. I'll clean up a t'ousand to-day—say, I like your mug; you ain't no stiff, or I miss my guess, an' I'll put you next a good t'ing, damme if I don't, an' you don't need to divvy up, neither. Dere's a chestnut runnin' in de Derby what dey call Larcen, an' I'm goin' to plank down a hun'red chicks on him."

He detected a look of incredulous unbelief in Mortimer's face, evidently, for he added, "You t'ink I ain't got no dough, eh?" He dug down into the folds

of his somewhat voluminous "pants" and drew forth a fair-sized roll. "See? That wad goes to Larcen straight. I see him do a gallop good enough for my stuff; but dey got a stable-boy on him, an' dat's why he'll be ten to one. But dat don't cut no ice wit' me. He'll be out for de goods; it's a gal owns him, an' dere'll be nut'in' doin'. Gal's name's Porter."

Again Mortimer started. What a little world it was, to be sure! Even here on the ferry boat, crowded with men of unchristian aspect, he heard the name of the woman he loved, and standing symbolical of honesty.

"What's the name of this—this horse?" he asked.

"Larcen."

"Do you mean Lauzanne?"

"Yes, dat's it. I jes' heered it, an' I t'ought it was Larcen. You've got it straight, stranger. Say, are you wise to anyt'in'?"

"Not about the horse; but I know the people—the young lady; and they'll win if they can—that's sure."

"Dere won't be many dead 'uns in de Derby. First money's good enough fer most of de owners. First horse, I see him gallop like a good 'un. An' I'm a piker; I like a bit of odds fer my stuff."

Mortimer saw the other occupants of the train moving toward the front end.

"I guess we're dere," said his companion; "perhaps I'll see you on de course. If you make a break to-day, play Larcen; he'll win. Say, I didn't catch your name."

"Mortimer."

"Well, take care of yourself, Mr. Morton. See you later."

. . . . . .

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

In his ignorance of a race meet Mortimer had felt sure he would be able to find Alan Porter without trouble. The true difficulty of his quest soon dawned upon him. Wedged into the pushing, shoving, hurrying crowd, in three minutes he had completely lost himself. A dozen times he rearranged his bearings, taking a certain flight of steps leading up to the grand stand as the base of his peregrinations; a dozen times he returned to this point, having accomplished nothing but complete bewilderment.

He asked questions, but the men he addressed were too busy to bother with him; some did not hear, others stared at him in distrust, and many tendered flippant remarks, such as "Ask a policeman;" "You'll find him in the bar;" "He's gone to Europe."

Even Mortimer's unpracticed mind realized speedily that it would be nothing short of a miracle if he were to find anyone in all those impatient thousands who even knew the person he was seeking. One young man he spoke to declared that he knew Alan Porter quite well; he was a great friend of his; he'd find him in a minute. This obliging stranger's quest led them into the long race track bar room, which somehow or other suggested to Mortimer a cattle shambles.

Behind the bar young men in white coats, even some in their shirt sleeves, were setting forth on its top, with feverish haste, clinking glasses that foamed and fretted much like the thirsty souls who called vociferously for liquid refreshment. Everybody seemed on fire—burnt up by the thirst of a consuming fever, the fever of speculation.

Mortimer's new friend suggested that they indulge in beer while waiting for the sought one's appearance,

and waxing confidential he assured his quarry that he had a lead-pipe cinch for the next race—it couldn't lose. The trainer was a bosom friend of his; a sort of hybrid brother in friendship. He himself was no tipster, he was an owner; he even went the length of flashing a bright yellow badge, as occult evidence of his standing.

These matters did not interest the searcher in the slightest; they only wasted his precious time. If he did not find Alan Porter soon the stolen money would be lost, he felt sure.

"I must find my friend," he said, cutting the garrulous man short. "Excuse me, I'll go and look for him."

But the other was insistent; ferret-like, he had unearthed good meat—a rare green one—and he felt indisposed to let his prey escape. His insistence matured into insolence as Mortimer spoke somewhat sharply to him. Ignorant of racing as the latter was, he was hardly a man to take liberties with once he recognized the infringement. The enormity of his mission and the possibility that it might be frustrated by his undesirable tormentor, made him savage. Raised to quick fury by a vicious remark of the tout who held him in leash, he suddenly stretched out a strong hand, and, seizing his insulter by the collar, gave him a quick twist that laid him on his back. Mortimer held him there, squirming for a full minute, while men gathered so close that the air became stifling.

Presently a heavy hand was laid on Mortimer's shoulder and a gruff policeman's voice asked, "What's the matter here?"

"Nothing much," Mortimer replied, releasing his

hold and straightening up; "this blackguard wanted me to bet on some horse, and when I refused, insulted me; that's all."

The other man had risen, his face purple from the twist at his throat. The officer looked at him.

"At it again, Mr. Bunco. I'll take care of him," he continued, turning to Mortimer. "He's a tout. Out you go," this to the other man. Then, tickled in the ribs by the end of the policeman's baton, the tout was driven from the enclosure; the spectators merged into a larger crowd, and Mortimer was left once more to pursue his fruitless search.

As he emerged into the open of the lawn he saw a gentleman standing somewhat listlessly, self-absorbed, as though he were not a party to the incessant turmoil of the others, who were as men mad.

With a faith born of limited experience, Mortimer risked another hazard. He would ask this complacent one for guidance. What he had to do justified all chances of rebuke.

"Pardon me, sir," he began, "I am looking for a young friend of mine whose people own race horses. Where would I be likely to find him?"

"If he's an owner he'll probably be in the paddock," replied the composed one.

"Could you tell me where the paddock is?"

"To the right," and sweeping his arm in that direction the stranger sank back into his inner consciousness, and blinked his eyes languidly, as though the unusual exertion of answering his inquisitor's questions had decidedly bored him.

"That man is one in a thousand; yea, forty thousand, for he is a stranger to excitement," Mortimer said to

himself, as he strode rapidly across the grass to a gate which opened in the direction the other had indicated. His eagerness had almost carried him through the gateway when a strong arm thrown across his chest, none too gently, barred his further progress.

"Show your badge, please," cried a voice.

Mortimer exposed the pasteboard he had acquired on his entry to the stand.

"You can't pass in here," said the guardian; "that's only good for the stand."

"But," began Mortimer.

"Stand aside—make room, please!" from the gatekeeper, cut short his conversation.

Others were waiting to pass through. In despair he gave up his untenable place, and once more was swallowed in the maelstrom of humanity that eddied about the stand enclosure.

As he was heading for his rock of locality, the stairway, hurrying somewhat recklessly, he ran with disturbing violence full tilt into a man who had erratically turned to his left, when according to all laws of the road he should have kept straight on.

"I beg pardon—" began Mortimer; then stared in blank amazement, cutting short his apology. The victim of his assault was Mr. Crane. The latter's close-lidded eyes had rounded open perceptibly in a look of surprise.

"Mr. Mortimer!" he exclaimed, "You here? May I ask who's running the bank?"

Anxious about the stolen money the sudden advent of Crane on his immediate horizon threw the young man into momentary confusion.

"My mother was ill—I got leave—I had to see Alan

Porter—I've come here to find him. They'll manage all right at the bank without me."

He fired his volley of explanation at his employer with the rapidity of a Maxim gun. Truth and what he considered excusable falsehood came forth with equal volubility. Crane, somewhat mollified, and feeling that at first he had spoken rather sharply, became more gracious. At sight of Mortimer he had concluded that it was to see Allis the young man had come, perhaps at her instigation.

"Have you seen Alan Porter, sir?" Mortimer asked, anxiously.

"I did, but that was about an hour ago. You will probably find him"—he was going to say—"in the paddock with his sister," but for reasons he refrained; "let me see, most likely sitting up in the grand stand."

As Mortimer stood scanning the sea of faces that rose wave on wave above him, Mr. Crane said, "I hope you found your mother better. If I see Alan I'll tell him you are looking for him."

When Mortimer turned around Crane had gone. He had meant to ask about the race Porter's horse Lauzanne was in, but had hesitated for fear he should say something which might give rise to a suspicion of his errand. He heard the rolling thunder of hoof beats in the air. From where he stood, over the heads of many people he could see gaudy colored silk jackets coming swiftly up the broad straight boulevard of the race course; even as he looked they passed by with a peculiar bobbing up-and-down motion. The effect was grotesque, for he could not see the horses, could not see the motive power which carried the bright-colored riders at such a terrific pace.

A thought flashed through his mind that it might be the Derby.

"What race is that?" he asked of one who stood at his elbow.

The man's face wore a sullen, discontented look, and no wonder, for he had, with misplaced confidence, wagered many dollars on a horse that was even then prancing gaily in many yards behind the winner.

"Do you know what race that was?" Mortimer repeated, thinking the silent one had not heard him.

"Why don't you look at your race card?" retorted the jaundiced loser, transporting himself and his troubles to the haven of liquid consolation.

His answer, curt as it was, gave Mortimer an inspiration. He looked about and saw many men consulting small paper pamphlets; they were like people in an art gallery, catalogue in hand.

By chance, Mortimer observed a young man selling these race catalogues, as he innocently named them. He procured one, and the seller in answer to a question told him it was the third race he had just seen, and the next would be the Brooklyn Derby.

There it was, all set forth in the programme he had just purchased. Seven horses to start, all with names unfamiliar except The Dutchman and Lauzanne. He had almost given up looking for Alan; it seemed so hopeless. At any rate he had tried his best to save the boy's honor; told deliberate lies to do it. Now it was pretty much in the hands of fate. He remembered what Alan had said about The Dutchman's certain chance of winning the coming race. He felt that if the horse won, Alan would put back the stolen thousand dollars; if not, where would the boy get money to cover up his theft?

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

It had seemed to Mortimer a foolish, desperate thing to risk money on anything so uncertain as a horse race; but here was at stake the honor of a bright, splendid young man—even the happiness of his parents, which the poor, deluded boy had wagered on one horse's chance of winning against six others. It was terrible. Mortimer shuddered, and closed his eyes when he thought of the misery, the shame, that would come to Allis and her mother when they knew, as they must, if Crane's horse were beaten, that the son was a thief. Oh, God! why couldn't he find the boy and save him before it was too late? Probably Alan had already betted the money; but even if that were so, he had vain visions of forcing the man who had received the stolen thousand to disgorge. No one had a right to receive stolen money; and if necessary, Mortimer would give him to understand that he was making himself a party to the crime.

But the mere fact that he couldn't find Alan Porter rendered him as helpless as a babe; he might as well have remained in the bank that day. How willingly he would have hastened back and replaced the money if he but had it. For Allis's sake he would have beggared himself, would have sacrificed a hundred times that sum to save her from the unutterable misery that must come if her brother were denounced as a felon. The love that was in him was overmastering him.

He was roused from his despondent train of thought by speech that struck with familiar jar upon his ear. It was the voice of the man who had descanted on the pleasures of betting during their journey from New York.

"What d'ye t'ink of it, pard?" was the first salutation.

Mortimer stammered the weak information that he didn't know what to think of it.

"Dere ain't no flies on us to-day—I'm knockin' 'em out in great shape. Can't pick a loser, blamed if I can. I've lined up for a cash-in t'ree times, an' I'll make it four straight, sure. Larcen'll come home all alone; you see if he don't."

"I hope so," rejoined Mortimer.

"I say, Mister Morton, put down a bet on him—he's good business; put a 'V' on, an' rake down fifty—dat'll pay your ex's. De talent's goin' for De Dutchman, but don't make no mistake about de other, he'll win."

In an instant the young man knew why this persistent worrier of a tortured spirit had been sent him. Fate gave him the cue; it whispered in his ear, "Put down a *hundred*—you have it—and win a *thousand;* then you can save Alan Porter—can keep this misery from the girl that is to you as your own life."

Mortimer listened eagerly; to the babbler at his side; to the whisper in his ear; to himself, that spoke within himself. Even if it were not all true, if Lauzanne were beaten, what of it? He would lose a hundred dollars, but that would not ruin him; it would cause him to save and pinch a little, but he was accustomed to self-denial.

"Will the betting men take a hundred dollars from me on this horse, Lauzanne?" he asked, after the minute's pause, during which these thoughts had flashed through his mind.

"Will dey take a *hundred?* Will dey take a *t'ousand!* Say, what you givin' me?"

"If Lauzanne won, I'd win a thousand, would I?"

"If you put it down straight; but you might play safe —split de hundred, fifty each way, win an' show; Larcen'll be one, two, t'ree, sure."

"I want to win a thousand," declared Mortimer.

"Den you've got to plump fer a win; he's ten to one."

Mortimer could hardly understand himself; he was falling in with the betting idea. It was an age since he stood at his desk in that bank, abhorrent of all gambling methods, to the present moment, when he was actually drawing from his pocket a roll of bills with which to bet on a horse.

He took a despairing look through the thicket of human beings that made a living forest all about, in a last endeavor to discover Alan Porter. Not three paces away a uniquely familiar figure was threading in and out the changing maze—it was Mike Gaynor.

Mortimer broke from his friend, and with quick steps reached the trainer's side.

"I want to find Alan Porter," he said, in answer to Gaynor's surprised salutation.

"He was in the paddock a bit ago," answered Mike; "he moight be there still."

Almost involuntarily Mortimer, as he talked, had edged back toward his friend of disconsolate raggedness.

"I wanted to go in there—I'd like to go now to find him, but they won't let me through the gate."

"No more they will," answered Mike, with untruthful readiness, for all at once it occurred to him that if Mortimer got to the paddock he might run up against Allis and recognize her.

"De gent could buy a badge and get in," volunteered Old Bill.

The lid of Mike's right eye drooped like the slide of a lantern, as he answered: "He couldn't get wan now—it's too late; just wait ye here, sir, and if the b'y's there wit' the nags, I'll sind him out."

Old Bill made no comment upon Mike's diplomatic misstatement anent the badge, for he had observed the wink, and held true to the masonry which exists between race-course regulars.

"Yes, please send him out then, Mr. Gaynor; it's important."

"I'm in a hurry meself," said Mike; "I just come out fer a minute; see here," and he nodded his head sideways to Mortimer. The latter walked by his side for a few steps.

"Who's that guy?" asked the Trainer.

"I don't know; he calls himself Old Bill."

"Well, ye best look out—he looks purty tough. What's he playin' ye fer?"

"He advised me to bet money on Lauzanne."

"The divil he did! What th' yellow moon does he know about the Chestnut; did ye back him?"

"Not yet."

"Are ye goin' to?"

"I don't know. Do you think Lauzanne might come in first?"

A slight smile relaxed the habitually drawn muscles of Mike's grim visage; it was moons since he had heard anybody talk of a horse "coming in first;" he was indeed a green bettor, this young man of the counting house. What was he doing there betting at all, Mike wondered. It must be because of his interest in the girl, his reason answered.

"I t'ink he'll win if he does his best for her."

"Does his best for *who*?"

Mike got to cover; his ungoverned tongue was always playing him tricks.

"Miss Allis is managin' the horses," he explained,

very deliberately, "an' there's a new b'y up on Lauzanne's back, d'ye onderstand; an' if the Chestnut doesn't sulk, does his best fer the young misthress that'll be watchin' him here in the stand wit' tears in her eyes, he moight win—d'ye onderstand?"

Yes, Mortimer understood; it seemed quite clear, for Mike had been to some pains to cover up the slip he had made.

"Now I must go," he continued; "an' ye needn't come in the paddock—if the b'y is there, I'll sind him out."

When Alan's seeker returned to Old Bill, he said, "Mr. Gaynor thinks your choice might come in first."

"Why was Irish steerin' you clear of de paddock?" asked the other.

"I suppose it was to save me the expense of buying a ticket for it."

The other man said nothing further, but the remembrance of Mike's wink convinced him that this was not the sole reason.

They waited for young Porter's appearance, but he did not come. "The geezer yer waitin' fer is not in dere or he'd a-showed up," said Old Bill; "an' if yer goin' to take de tip, we'd better skip to de ring an' see what's doin'."

Mortimer had once visited the stock exchange in New York. He could not help but think how like unto it was the betting ring with its horde of pushing, struggling humans, as he wormed his way in, following close on Old Bill's heels. There was a sort of mechanical aptness in his leader's way of displacing men in his path. Mortimer realized that but for his guide he never would have penetrated beyond the outer shell of the buzzing hive. Even then he hoped that he might, by the direction of

chance, see Alan Porter. The issue at stake, and the prospect of its solution through his unwonted betting endeavor, was dispelling his inherent antipathy to gambling; he was becoming like one drunken with the glamour of a new delight; his continued desire to discover young Porter was more a rendering of tithes to his former god of chastity which he was about to shatter.

Two days before betting on horse races was a crime of indecent enormity; now it seemed absolutely excusable, justified, almost something to be eagerly approved of. Their ingress, though strenuous, was devoid of rapidity; so, beyond much bracing of muscles, there was little to take cognizance of except his own mental transformation. Once he had known a minister, a very good man indeed, who had been forced into a fight. The clergyman had acted his unwilling part with such muscular enthusiasm that his brutish opponent had been reduced to the lethargic condition of inanimate pulp. Mortimer compared his present exploit with that of his friend, the clergyman; he felt that he was very much in the same boat. He was eager to have the bet made and get out into the less congested air; his companions of the betting ring were not men to tarry among in the way of moral recreation.

The mob agitated itself in waves; sometimes he and Old Bill were carried almost across the building by the wash of the living tide as it set in that direction; then an undertow would sweep them back again close to their starting point. The individual members of the throng were certainly possessed of innumerable elbows, and large jointed knees, and boots that were forever raking at his heels or his corns. They seemed taller, too, than men in the open; strive as he might he could see noth-

The betting-ring.

ing—nothing but heads that topped him in every direction. Once the proud possessor of a dreadful cigar of unrivaled odor became sandwiched between him and his fellow-pilgrim; he was down wind from the weed and its worker, and the result was all but asphyxiation.

At last they reached some sort of a harbor; it was evidently an inlet for which his pilot had been sailing. A much composed man in a tweed suit, across which screamed lines of gaudy color, sat on a camp stool, with a weary, tolerant look on his browned face; in his hand was a card on which was penciled the names of the Derby runners with their commercial standing in the betting mart.

Old Bill craned his neck over the shoulder of the sitting man, scanned the book, and turning to Mortimer said, "Larcen's nine to one now; dey're cuttin' him—wish I'd took tens; let's go down de line."

They pushed out into the sea again, and were buffeted of the human waves; from time to time Old Bill anchored for a few seconds in the tiny harbor which surrounded each bookmaker; but it was as though they were all in league—the same odds on every list.

"It's same as a 'sociation book," he grunted; "de cut holds in every blasted one of 'em. Here's Jakey Faust," he added, suddenly; "let's try him."

"What price's Larcen?" he asked of the fat bookmaker.

"What race is he in?" questioned the penciler.

"Dis race; what you givin' me!"

"Don't know the horse."

Mortimer interposed. "The gentleman means *Lauzanne,*" he explained.

Faust glared in the speaker's face. "Why th' 'ell don't

he talk English then; I'm no Chinaman, or a mind reader, to guess what he wants. Lauzanne is nine to one; how much d'ye want?"

"Lay me ten?" asked Old Bill of the bookmaker.

"To how much?"

"A hun'red; an' me frien' wants a hun'red on, too."

"I'll do it," declared Faust, impatiently. "Ten hundred to one, *Lauzanne!*" he called over his shoulder to his clerk, taking the bettor's money; an' the number is—?"

"Twenty-five, t'ree-four-six!" answered Old Bill. "Pass him yer dust," he continued, turning to his companion.

The latter handed his money to Faust.

"*Lauzanne!*" advised Old Bill.

"A thousand-to-hundred—Lauzanne, win; an' the number is—" he stretched out his hand, and turning over Mortimer's dangling badge, read aloud, "Twenty-five, three-five-seven."

He took a sharp look at the two men; his practised eye told him they were not plungers, more of the class that usually bet ten dollars at the outside; they were evidently betting on information; two one-hundred-dollar bets coming together on Lauzanne probably meant stable money.

"Let's git out, mister," cried Old Bill, clutching Mortimer's arm.

"Don't I get anything—a receipt, or—"

Faust heard this and laughed derisively. "You won't need nothin' to show for this money," he said.

"We'll be roun' at de back in a few minutes fer a couple of t'ou'," retorted Old Bill. "Let's cut t'rough

here," he added to his companion, making a passage between the bookmakers.

Bill's knowledge of the local geography was good, and skirting the crowd they were soon out on the lawn.

"Let's watch de parade," Mortimer's adjutant suggested, and he led the way down to the course, where they stood against the rail, waiting.

XXXV

DURING this time there was a bustle of much interest in the paddock. Allis, ready dressed in the Porter colors, had been driven to the course half an hour before the time set for the Derby. Her face was as satisfactorily disguised with dust as though she had ridden three races.

Mike assiduously attended to every detail; even the weighing, thanks to his officious care, was a matter of not more than one minute. The girl's weight was one hundred and ten pounds, the saddle brought it up to one hundred and thirteen. She would have to ride at least two pounds overweight, for the horse's impost was one hundred and eleven. Lauzanne was being led in a circle by a boy, so Allis shielded herself from the general gaze in his empty stall. She felt quite sure that nobody there would recognize her, unless, perhaps, Philip Crane. He was rarely seen in the paddock, but might this day come out to view The Dutchman. The latter horse came in for a great deal of attention, for he had been steadily backed down to the position of equal favorite with White Moth.

At last there was the summons to saddle, and Lauzanne was brought into the stall by Dixon. Then the door was shrouded by an ever-changing semicircle of curious observers. Allis gave a little start and turned her head away as Crane, pushing through the others, stood just inside the stall and spoke to Dixon.

"Your horse looks very well; I hope you win, if I don't."

"He's as good as we could make him," answered the Trainer, as he adjusted the weight cloth.

"Is Miss Porter here?" were Crane's next words, quite in the tone of a casually interested friend.

"She may be in the stand," Dixon answered, without turning his head. Mike had deliberately interposed his body between Allis and the doorway. To the girl's relief, without further comment, Crane quietly moved away.

"Excuse me, *Al,* fer standin' in front av ye," said Mike, "but these outsiders is enough to make a b'y narvous the way they stare at him. Alan Porter was in the paddock a minute ago askin' fer his sister, but I hustled him out, telling him ye—I mean she—was in the stand."

"Thank you, Mike; you're a good friend," replied the girl, gratefully.

Dixon had never taken so much care over the preparation of a horse for a race in all his life; and at last everything was as perfect as it could possibly be made. Lauzanne's behavior gladdened the girl's heart; he was as supremely indifferent to the saddling, to the staring of the people, to the scent of battle that was in the soft summer air, as though he were in his own stable at home. Not a muscle of his huge flank trembled. Once, as the bridle rein was loosened for an instant, he half turned in the stall, curved his neck and stretched his golden nozzle toward the small figure in blue silk, as though he fain would make sure by scent that one of his natural enemies, a man jockey, had not been thrust upon him. Allis understood this questioning move-

ment, and reaching out her hand rubbed the gray velvet of his nose. But for the restraining rein, tightened quickly by the boy who held him, Lauzanne would have snuggled his head against his little mistress.

"They understand each other," said Dixon to Mike, in an undertone; "we'll get all that's in him this trip."

"Bot' t'umbs up! if he doesn't come home alone I'll eat me hat. The sharks'll get a knock this journey that'll make 'em take a tumble to themselves."

Dixon stepped back to the corner where Allis was and said: "I guess I can't give you no orders. He's a bit sluggish at the post, an' a few false breaks won't hurt him none. Just don't be afraid, that's all. A mile an' a half's a long journey, an' you'll have plenty of time to take their measure. He's sure to get away last, but that won't matter; there'll be plenty of openin's to get through after you've gone a mile. Just keep your eye on The Dutchman—he's a stayer from 'way back; an' Westley may kid you that he's beat comin' up the stretch, for he's slick as they make them, an' then come with a rattle at the finish an' nose you out on the post. Don't never let up once you're into the stretch; if you're ten lengths ahead don't let the Chestnut down, but keep a good holt on him, an' finish as though they was all lapped on your quarter. There's a horse in the race I don't understand; he can no more get a mile an' a half than I could; it's the Indian, an' why they're puttin' up the startin' price beats me, unless"—and he lowered his voice to a whisper—"there's a job to carry Lauzanne, or White Moth, or somethin' off their feet. Just watch the Indian, an' don't let him shut you in on the rail if you can help it. They've put up Redpath, an' that beats me, too, for I think he's straight. But

the Indian hasn't a ghost of a chance to win. You'd better take a whip."

"I don't want either whip or spurs," answered the girl. "Lauzanne will do better without them."

"I know that, but take a whip—something else in the race might need it; an' if you have to use it, use it good an' strong. If Langdon lodges an objection I can make him quit."

Over at The Dutchman's stall there was a very confindent party. Their horse would go to the post as fit as any thoroughbred had ever stripped. Langdon was a great trainer—there was no doubt about that; if there had been Crane would have discovered it and changed his executive officer. The tall son of Hanover was lean of flesh, but gross in muscle. He was as though an Angelo had chiseled with sure hand from his neck, and ribs, and buttocks all the marble of useless waste, and left untouched in sinewy beauty layer on layer, each muscle, and thew, and cord. Flat-boned and wide the black-glossed legs, and over the corded form a silken skin of dull fire-red. From the big eyes gleamed an expectant delight of the struggle; not sluggishly indifferent, as was Lauzanne's, but knowing of the fray and joyous in its welcome.

"He'll win on a tight rein," confided Langdon to Jockey Westley; "he's the greatest Hanover in the land. There's a dozen races bottled up in that carcass"—and he slapped the big Bay lovingly on the rump—"but if you're put to it, Bill, you can call on him fer the full dozen to-day. There's nothin' to it but yourself and White Moth."

Carelessly he stepped to the back of the stall, touching Westley as he passed. Kicking the loose dirt with

his toes, and bending his head to bury his voice, Langdon continued in a subdued tone: "The Indian'll cut out the pace so fast that it'll choke off Lauzanne. The Chestnut's a plugger an' ain't no good when it comes to gallopin'. If you was to all loaf aroun' he might hang on an' finish in front; but the pace'll kill him—it'll break his heart; the fast goin'll lay out White Moth, too, for she'll go to the front an' die away after a mile an' a quarter. Just nurse the Bay, an' let the others fight the Indian. But don't loaf an' let Lauzanne get near you, fer he can keep up a puddlin' gait all day. There ain't nothin' else in the race I'm afraid of; there ain't one of them can last a mile an' a half." Then he added, with a disagreeable chuckle—it was like the slobbering laugh of a hyena—"I miss my guess if the boy on Lauzanne kills himself tryin' to win anyway. He seems a fair lad, but you can ride rings 'round him, Bill."

"I'll put up a good ride on The Dutchman, an' I think we'll ketch the Judge's eye," replied Westley. "It doesn't seem to stand for it that a stable-boy on a bad horse like Lauzanne is goin' to beat me out."

"The boss says you're to have two thousand fer winnin', Westley, so don't make no mistake. I wasn't goin' to tell you this afore you went out, fer fear it'd make you too eager. Many a race's been thrown away by a boy bein' too keen, an' makin' his run too early in the game; but you've a good head and might as well know what you're to have. There's the bugle; get up."

Eager hands stripped the blanket that had been thrown over The Dutchman; Westley was lifted into the saddle, and the gallant Bay led out by Langdon.

In front strode White Moth; one by one the others,

and last, seventh, Allis's fatal number, lagged Lauzanne, lazily loafing along as though he regretted leaving the stall.

As the horses passed to the course, Crane, who had followed The Dutchman to the gate, raised his eyes from scanning Lauzanne to the rider on his back. It was just a look of languid interest in the apprentice boy Dixon had put up instead of such a good jockey as Redpath. The face rivetted his attention; something in the line of the cheek recalled a face he had constantly in view.

"For an instant I thought that was Alan Porter on Lauzanne," he said to Langdon, who was at his elbow. "A strange fancy—I'm going up to the stand to watch the race."

"It's all roight but the win now," said Mike to Dixon. "I'm goin' in be the Judges' box to watch the finish. You'll be helpin' the b'y pass the scales, Andy."

As Allis passed the Judges' Stand in the parade she cast a quick, furtive look toward the people on the lawn. She seemed pilloried on an eminence, lifted up in pitiless prominence; would anyone detect her at the last moment? Hanging over the rail in the very front she saw a pale face that struck a chill of fear to her heart—it was Mortimer's. She had not even thought of his being there. She had eluded the close scrutiny of all the others who were likely to recognize her, but there, within ten yards were eyes almost certain to penetrate her disguise. The girl turned her face away; she knew Mortimer well enough to think that if he did recognize her he would make no sign.

"That's our horse," declared Old Bill, as Lauzanne passed. "He's all right, bet yer life; he's fit ter go all

day. De geezer as trains him ain't no mug. Let's go up in de stand, where we can see de whole show; den we'll come down an' cash in. Say, pard, if dis goes through I'll blow you off to a bottle of de best; wine ain't none too good fer dis coop."

Altogether it was as though Destiny had found pleasant domicile in the ancient clothing of Old Bill, and was using their unique wearer as a protective agent to ward off evil from both Mortimer and the girl. As they jogged toward the starting post Allis allowed Lauzanne to lag; she wished to avoid Redpath. But the Indian was a horse of uncertain temperament, and presently, with a foolish side rush, he cannoned fair into Lauzanne. In the melee Redpath looked full into Allis's eyes at short range. His face went white in an instant.

"You!" he cried, pulling hard at his horse's mouth; "it's you, Miss—" He stopped suddenly. "God! I'm glad I know this," he jerked between set teeth, as he fought the Indian, who was nearly pulling him out of the saddle.

"It's because he'll gallop for you, isn't it? You didn't think I was a wrong one—it wasn't because you couldn't trust me you took the mount away, was it?"

The Indian, quieted by the sleepy Chestnut, was going steadier.

"No; it's because Lauzanne won't give his running for anyone but me," the girl answered.

The boy remained silent, thinking over why he was on the Indian. There was a moral obliquity about his present position; the new light of his discovery showed him this strongly. His feelings had been played upon by the owner of the Indian, at Langdon's instigation.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

He had been told that the Porters had not given him the mount on Lauzanne because they distrusted him. He had been put on the horse to make running for The Dutchman. There was nothing really patently dishonest about this arrangement, and Redpath's mind had been dulled to fine discrimination by the idea that he was falsely distrusted.

Presently the boy spoke with sharp decision, in quick broken sentences, for they were nearing the Starter. "I'm in to make the running; this crock's got no license to win. Don't you bother about him—he'll come back to the others fast enough when he's done. When you want an opening to get through just come bang into me—I'll be next the rail; yell 'Lauzanne,' an' I'll pull out. I'll give them blasted crooks something to stare at. Don't gallop your mount's head off chasing this sprinter; he'll be beat when we swing into the stretch. Don't go wide at the turn; you can have my place; I'll make it wide for something else though."

They were at the post. Allis had not spoken; she had listened gratefully to Redpath's string of kindly directions. The presence of a friend in the race cheered her; the discovery she had dreaded had come as a blessing.

XXXVI

CRANE'S words had started a train of thought in Langdon's mind. All at once he remembered that the face of Lauzanne's rider had a dream-like familiarity. He had not given it much thought before; but his owner's suggestion that the boy was like Alan Porter echoed in his ears. He had wondered where Dixon had got this new boy; why he was putting him up on Lauzanne instead of Redpath; it seemed a foolish thing to give the mount to an apprentice when a good jockey was to be had. Could it be that it really was Alan. The whole family were natural-born jockeys, father and son, even the girl, Allis.

Langdon knew nothing of Alan Porter's movements—had not been interested enough to know. He had heard derogatory remarks about Redpath's riding of Lucretia in the Brooklyn Handicap; the Porters, no doubt dissatisfied—suspicious of the jockey—had put up Alan to insure an honest ride.

Langdon had thought these thoughts as he passed swiftly from the paddock to the stand inclosure, where he stood not far from the rail, trying to get a good look at the lad on Lauzanne. Allis's persistently averted face thwarted this. The boy was inscribed on the jockey board "Al Mayne;" the permit to ride must be under that name. If it were really Alan Porter, why had he been called Mayne? But the boy had retained the name "Al"—that was a contraction of Alan, no doubt.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

While Langdon labored over the problem of Mayne's identity he had watched the horses at the post through his glasses. The Dutchman was behaving well, his trifle of eagerness to break away was even better than Lauzanne's indolent indifference. The other five were acting as three-year-olds are wont to act—with erratic indecision; one minute violent desire, and the next obstinate reluctance characterizing their interminable twistings, backings, and plungings. It was not for long; a neck or a length at the start meant little when a mile and a half stretched its tiring length between them and the finish post.

Langdon's perplexity was cut short by the cry, "They're off!" the jingle of a bell, and the scurrying of many feet, as eager men rushed for higher points of observation in the stand.

As the seven horses came thundering by, pulling double in eager ignorance of the long journey that lay before them, Langdon saw with evil satisfaction that the Indian was well out in the lead.

The Dutchman was sixth, and behind, with a short awkward strength in his gallop, loafed Lauzanne.

There was smoothness in the stride of Hanover's big son, The Dutchman; and his trainer, as he watched him swing with strong grace around the first turn, mentally fingered the ten thousand dollars that would shortly be his.

"That skate win!" he sneered, as Lauzanne followed; "he gallops like a fat pig. He can't live the pace—he can't live the pace," he repeated, and his voice was mellow with a cheerful exultation.

His observations seemed eminently truthful; Allis's horse trailed farther and farther behind the others. Out

in front galloped with unseeming haste the Indian—a brown blotch of swift-gliding color. Two lengths from his glinting heels raced four horses in a bunch—two bays, a gray, and a black; so close together that they formed a small mosaic of mottled hue against the drab-gray background of the course stables beyond. Then The Dutchman, with his powerful stride, full of easy motion—a tireless gallop that would surely land him the winner, Langdon thought, as he hung with breathless interest on every move of Westley's body.

Up in the stand Old Bill was expressing in florid race-track speech to Mortimer his deductions.

"Dat's a good kid on Larcen. See what he's doin'; he's trailin' 'em. Dat's where our horse gits it; he's a stretch runner, he is. Dey'll have bellows to mend when he tackles 'em."

To Mortimer it appeared very much as though the other horses were too fast for Lauzanne. "Isn't he losing?" he asked of his exuberant friend.

"Losin' nut'in'! De kid ain't moved on him yet. De others is gallopin' der heads off; dey're chasin' de crazy skate in front. Dere's only two jocks in de race worth a damn—Bill Westley an' de kid on our horse. He knows he's got to beat Dutchy, an' he's lyin' handy by. When you see Dutchy move up Larcen'll come away, or I'm a goat."

Mike Gaynor had taken his place on the little platform at the top of the steps leading to the stand. He was watching the race with intense interest. Would Lauzanne do his best for the girl—or would he sulk? He saw the terrific pace that the Indian had set the others. Would it discourage their horse. His judgment told him that this fast pace could not last, and that Lauzanne

could gallop as he was going from end to end of the mile and a half; even faster if he so wished. Would his rider have the patient steadiness of nerve to wait for this fulfillment of the inevitable—or would she become rattled and urge the horse. Mike set his teeth, and his nails were driven hard into his rough palms as he strained in sympathy with the girl's quietude.

How long the Indian held on in his mad lead! Perhaps even he might upset all clever calculation and last long enough to win. Already the gray, White Moth, had drawn out from the bunch and was second; the other three were dropping back in straggling order to The Dutchman, who was still running as he had been, strong. That was at the mile. At the mile and an eighth, White Moth was at the Indian's heels; The Dutchman had moved up into third place, two lengths away; and Lauzanne had become merged in the three that were already beaten. At the mile and a quarter a half thrill of hope came to Mike, for Lauzanne was clear of the ruck, and surely gaining on the leaders. And still his rider was lying low on the withers, just a blue blur on the dark gold of the Chestnut.

"Bot' t'umbs! but they're a pair," muttered the Irishman; "be me soul, I t'ink they'll win."

At the bottom turn into the stretch Mike could see that White Moth and The Dutchman had closed up on the Indian, so that they swung around the corner as one horse.

"Gad, she's shut off!" he muttered. It was a living wall, and through little chinks in its quivering face he could see specks of blue close up where raced Lauzanne.

"Poor gurl!" he gasped, "they've got her in a pocket.

Damn them b'ys. Why did she hug the rail—she's fair t'rowed away the last chance."

Halfway up the steps stood Langdon, and his coarse, evil face took on a look of unholy joy as Lauzanne was blotted into oblivion by the horses in front.

"Pocketed, by God! Clever Mister Dixon to put up a kid like that ag'in' Westley an' the others," he sneered.

Then a deafening roar went up from the stand. Somebody thrust a pair of broad shoulders in front of Mike's face; he leaned out far past the intruder, and saw the Indian sway drunkenly in his stride away from the rail, carrying White Moth and The Dutchman out; and into the opening he had left, glued to the rail, crept the chestnut form of Lauzanne.

A wild yell of Irish joy escaped Mike; then he waited. Now it *would* be a race; but Lauzanne was trying, trying all by himself, for the rider was as still as death. Already the clamor of many voices was splitting the air; all over the stand it was, "The favorite wins! The Dutchman wins!" Even yet there was no beckoning call for Lauzanne; but Mike knew. He had said to Allis before she went out, "If ye ever get level wit' 'em in the straight, ye can win."

And now Lauzanne's yellow head was even with the others; and soon it was in front. And then there were only two battling—Lauzanne and The Dutchman; and on the Bay, Westley was riding with whip and spur.

"In a walk—in a walk, I tell you!" fairly screamed Old Bill, clutching at Mortimer's arm; "didn't I tell you? We're a t'ousand to de good. Look at him, look at him!" He had climbed halfway up Mortimer's strong back in his excitement. "Look at de kid! Never moved—in a walk, in a walk! Larcen all the way for a *million!*"

Into the opening, glued to the rail, crept the chestnut form of Lauzanne.

His voice generally weak and tattered like his clothes, had risen to a shrill scream of exultation.

It was past all doubt. Lauzanne, a length in front of The Dutchman, was opposite the stand; in two seconds they had flashed by the Judges' box, and Lauzanne had won.

The wave of humanity that swept down the steps carried Mike in its front wash. He took his stand close to the Judges' box; there he would be handy for whatever might be needed. He saw Langdon with a face dark and lowering, full of an evil discontent, standing there too. Back the seven runners cantered. Lauzanne's rider saluted the judge with whip, and slipping from the horse stripped him of the saddle with deft fingers, and passed quickly into the scales. The weight was right. One after another the boys weighed.

Watching, Mike saw Langdon pass up to the Stewards. There was a short consultation, the hush of something wrong, and a murmur of an objection.

"What's the matter?" a voice questioned in Mike's ear. It was Alan Porter that had spoken.

Mike pushed his way to the small gate, even through it, that led up to the Stewards' Stand. As he did so Langdon came back down the steps. One of the Stewards, following him with quick eyes, saw Mike and beckoned with a finger.

"There's an objection to the rider of Lauzanne," said the official; "Trainer Langdon says Alan Porter rode the horse under a permit belonging to a boy named Mayne."

"He's mistook, sir." answered Mike, respectfully; "there's Alan Porter standin' down there in the crowd. I'll sind him up, sir, an' ye can ask him yerself."

Gaynor passed hurriedly down the steps, seized Porter

by the arm, and whispered in his ear, "Tell the judge yer name—that a b'y named Mayne rode Lauzanne. Quick now."

Then he stepped up to Langdon. The latter had seen Alan Porter go up the steps, and realized he had made a mistake. Mike drew him inside the little inclosure that surrounded the stand.

"There's Alan Porter wit' the Stewards," Gaynor whispered close to the man's face; "an' ye'll withdraw the objection at once. If ye don't ye'll have to settle wit' the Stewards fer tryin' to bribe the b'y Mayne to pull Lauzanne. And Shandy has owned up that he was to get five hundred dollars fer dosin' Lucretia. Ye'll withdraw now, or get ruled off fer life; besides, p'isinin' a horse is jail business; an' I'll take me oath before God I can prove this, too. Now go an' withdraw quick. Ye're a damn blackguard."

Mike had meant to restrict himself to diplomatic pressure, but his Irish was up like a flash, and he couldn't resist the final expression of wrath.

A crowd of silent men had gathered about the box in a breathless wait. Fortunes depended upon the brief consultation that was being held between the Stewards.

As Alan Porter came down Langdon went up the steps with nervous haste. "I've made a mistake, gentlemen," he said to the Stewards, "with your permission I'll withdraw the objection."

"Yes, it's better that way," returned one of the Stewards; "the best horse won, and that's what racing's for. It would be a pity to spoil such a grand race on a technicality."

XXXVII

After his first burst of aboriginal glee, ecstatically uncouth as it was, Old Bill's joy over the victory of Lauzanne took on a milder form of expression.

"Let's line up fer a cash-in," he exclaimed to Mortimer, making a break down the steps to the lawn. On the ground he stopped, his mind working at fever heat, changing its methods quickly.

"Let's wait till de kid's passed de scales; dere's no hurry. Dere won't be many drawin' down money over Larcen; he's an outsider."

They were still waiting when the rumor of an objection floated like an impalpable shadow of evil through the enclosure. Old Bill's seamed face shed its mask of juvenile hilarity, and furrowed back into its normal condition of disgruntled bitterness. He had seen the slight mix-up when the Indian swerved in the straight. The objection must have to do with that, he thought. "What th' 'ell's th' difference," he said in fierce, imprecating anger; "de kid on Larcen didn't do no interferin', he jes come t'rough de openin' an' won—dey can't disqualify him."

"What does it mean?" asked Mortimer; "what's wrong?"

"De push's tryin' to steal de race; de favorite's beat, an' it's win, tie, or wrangle wit' 'em. If dey take de race away from Larcen we don't get de goods, see? Our t'ou's up de spout. Dere he goes, dere he

goes; look at de knocker," as Langdon came down from the Stewards.

Mortimer's heart sank. An exultation such as he had never experienced in his life had flushed his breast hot; the back of his scalp had tickled in a creepy way as Lauzanne flashed first past the winning post. He had felt pride in the horse, in the boy on his back, in himself at having overcome his scruples; he would be able to save Alan Porter from dishonor. His heart had warmed to the tattered outcast at his side, who had been the means to this glorious end. It had been all over, accomplished; now it was again thrust back into the scales, where it dangled as insecure as ever. It wasn't the money alone that teetered in the balance, but the honor of Allis Porter's brother.

He gave a sharp cry of astonishment, for going up the steps in front of them was the boy himself, Alan. Presently he came down again, his face looking drawn and perplexed. In his ignorance of everything pertaining to racing Mortimer feared for an instant the theft of the thousand dollars had been discovered, and the present inquiry had something to do with that, else why was Alan mixed up in it.

As the boy came through the little gate Mortimer accosted him. "Hello, Alan!" he exclaimed, very gently, "what's the trouble?"

"Just a silly mistake," answered Porter, a weak laugh following his words; "Langdon has claimed that I rode Lauzanne."

"Is dat it?" interposed Old Bill; "an' did you tell dem dey was wrong—de stiffs! Dere's cutt'roat Langdon up again; here he comes back, looking as t'ough he'd been fired fer splint—de crook! Hello! it's all

right Hoo-ray! Lauzanne gits de race!" For already the cry of "All right!" was ringing through the betting ring. "Come on, pard," called Old Bill, eagerly, to Mortimer; "let's go an' rake down de dough."

"In a minute," the other answered; and turning to Alan Porter, took him by the arm and led him to one side. "I suppose you lost over The Dutchman," he said.

"Yes, I'm broke," answered the boy, with a plaintive smile.

"Well, I've won."

"You betting!" exclaimed Alan, in astonishment.

"Yes—strange, isn't it? But I'm going to put that money of your father's back."

The boy said nothing, and Mortimer fancied that his face flushed guiltily.

"Yes, I can put it back now that Lauzanne's won," continued Mortimer; "but don't say a word to a soul about it, I don't want anybody to know I was betting."

"But what money?" began Alan.

"I've won a thousand dollars on Lauzanne—"

"Come on, pard," said Old Bill, impatiently interrupting them, "let's get our rake off, an' den you kin buck to yer chum after."

Mortimer yielded to the tattered one's command, for without his guidance he never would be able to find the man that held the money.

"I'll be back in a little while," he said to young Porter; "don't go away."

There was delay over the cashing in; being late, they found a line of Lauzanne men in front of them at the bookmaker's stand.

When Mortimer returned to the lawn with eleven hundred dollars in his pocket Alan Porter had gone. He had dreaded that perhaps the boy might do something desperate, fearing discovery of the theft; he had thought even of taking Alan back to Brookfield with him; however, he had told him that the money would be replaced, the boy would understand that nothing could happen him and would go back, Mortimer felt sure. He spent a short time searching for Alan, but his former fruitless quest had shown him the hopelessness of trying to find a person in that immense throng. He thought kindly of the enveloping mob that had kept him hidden from Allis, as he thought. He had feared to meet her—something in his presence might cause her to suspect that something was wrong. The whole episode was like a fairy dream. It was a queer twist of Fate's web, his winning enough over Lauzanne—he, a man who had never betted in his life—to replace the money the brother had stolen.

All at once it occurred to him that some reward was due the instigator of his success. The thousand he must keep intact. He had a few loose dollars in his pocket beyond his original hundred, quite sufficient to take him back to Brookfield. Taking the hundred from his pocket and turning to Old Bill, who was still with him, he said: "I'm going home, I've had enough horse racing for one day; you've done me a great kindness—will you take this hundred—I need the thousand badly, so can't spare more than this."

"Not on yer life, pard. I give you de tip first, but you got de office straight from Irish, an' we're quits, see? I wasn't playin' you fer a sucker, an' yer straight goods. Jes' shove de boodle in yer breast pocket, an' don't

show it to no one. Dere's some here as would take it off you quick enough."

"But—"

"Dere ain't no buts in dis game—it's a straight deal, an' we've split even. If you'd been a crook, well, God knows how we'd a-panned out. But you ain't no geezer of dat sort—yer square, an' Old Bill wishes you good luck till de robins nest again. Yer goin', eh? Say, pard, I'd a-been wearin' diamon's if I could quit when I was 'head of de game. Yer dead onto it. Here's my hand, Mr. Morton."

"Mortimer—George Mortimer."

"Well, shake, George. Where do you hang out?"

"Brookfield."

"My address is New York. Dat's as close a fit as I knows at present. If de run o' luck keeps up p'r'aps I'll write you from de Waldorf. Good-bye, ol' man."

With a light heart Mortimer hastened from Gravesend, not waiting for the other races, and took his way to Brookfield. A genuine admiration of buffeted Old Bill filled his mind.

In the morning he would be at the bank bright and early, and replace the stolen thousand dollars; nobody would know that it had been taken. The narrow escape that had come to Alan Porter might prove his salvation. Surely it would cure him of his desire to bet. Out of all this evil positive good would accrue.

XXXVIII

After winning on Lauzanne Allis had dodged the admiring crowd of paddock regulars that followed her. As Lauzanne was being blanketed she had kissed the horse's cheek and given him a mighty squeeze of thankfulness. How nobly he had done his part; good, dear old despised, misjudged Lauzanne. He had veritably saved her father from disaster; had saved her from—from many things.

She had slipped into her long coat and stood waiting for Mike to drive her to Dixon's cottage when the rumor came of an objection. Then there had been the misery of terrible suspense, a wait of uncertainty. Was her sacrifice of womanly instinct to go for nothing? Dixon had hurried to the scene of investigation; then he had come back after a little with Mike, and the good news that they had been given the race. If it had not been for prying eyes she would have knelt there at Lauzanne's feet and offered up a prayer of thankfulness. She had done all a woman could do, almost more; Providence had not forsaken her and her stricken father.

Then Mike had hurried her to the buggy just as Crane, leaving the beaten Dutchman and Langdon, had come, asking Dixon where Miss Porter was, that he might tender congratulations. He wanted to see the boy that had ridden Lauzanne, also—wanted to take his hand and tell him what a grand race he had ridden. But Dixon had been ready with excuses; the boy was

dead beat after the race—he was only a kid—and had gone to Dixon's home. Miss Porter was perhaps in the stand, or perhaps she had gone home also. Crane knew of Langdon's objection. It was a silly thing, he said, due to overeagerness. He had taken no part in it, he assured Dixon. Alan Porter, too, came into the paddock, asking for his sister; but fared pretty much as Crane had. He would certainly find her at the cottage, Dixon assured him.

That night Allis wired the joyful tidings to her father, and that she would be home in the morning.

Dr. Rathbone's prophecy as to the proper medication for John Porter stood a chance of being fulfilled in one day. Allis's telegram proved that the doctor had understood the pathology of Porter's treatment, for he became as a cripple who had touched the garment of a magic healer.

It was thus that Allis found him when she reached Ringwood. Oh, but she was glad; and small wonder. What she had done was as nothing; it shrank into insignificance under the glamourous light of the change that had come over the home. What a magic wand was deserved success; how it touched with fairy aspect all that drooped with the fearsome blight of anticipated decay! And even then they did not know the full extent of her endeavor. Mingled with her mother's gentle welcome, and her father's full-throated thanks, was praise for the, to him unknown, boy that had ridden Lauzanne so gallantly.

The girl found tears of thankfulness glistening in her eyes as she listened to the praise that was wholly hers, though given in part to the jockey. They had not even heard his name—it had not mattered before;

and now when her father asked for it, she answered that Mike called him Al something. Her father, generous in his salvation, was most solicitous as to a fitting present; a thousand dollars, or perhaps two, or even more, if Dixon advised so. What had he promised the lad? But there were so many things to talk over and settle, and laugh about, and congratulate each other upon. Good fortune was a generous dame. They were all like children in their happiness.

"Yes, Alan had been there," the girl answered to a question from her father. Also it was a strange happening, a distortion of fate that Crane had beaten them in the Brooklyn with Diablo, and now they had beaten his horse, The Dutchman, with Lauzanne the Despised. All was content after the turmoil of endeavor.

And of the horses, Lauzanne, who would gallop for no one but Allis, would be brought back to Ringwood, to be petted and spoiled of his young mistress for the good he had done. Lucretia, when convalescent, would also come to the farm to rest and get strong.

In the midst of it all Dr. Rathbone came in, and of course, man-like and doctor-like, with pretended pomposity, said: "I told you so. What did I say? Now Mrs. Porter, no more scolding over the ways of horses—a good horse is a delight, and a good daughter a joy forever."

Dear old Dr. Rathbone, wise in his generation and big of heart!

XXXIX

At the bank down in the village—well, at nine o'clock Mortimer, feeling the virtue of early effort, with the money of redemption in his pocket, entered into the resumption of his duties.

At the earliest moment after the vault was opened he made his way to the box that contained the Porter payment. One thing troubled him slightly. It was a thousand-dollar bill that had been taken; the money he had to replace was in hundreds and fifties. As he slipped them quietly into the box he thought it wouldn't really matter; he would transfer the three thousand to the account himself, and nobody would know of the change. Leaving the box where it was for a little, in the way of subtle strategy, he came out and busied himself over other matters.

To Mortimer's slight astonishment, presently the cashier, Mr. Lane, came out from his office, and speaking somewhat carelessly, said: "Mr. Mortimer, you have that Porter note and money in charge. It is due to-day, isn't it?"

Looking up, Mortimer saw Lane's eye fixed upon his face with piercing intensity. He flushed out of sheer nervousness.

"Yes, sir," he stammered, "it is. "I'll attend to it at once."

"Ah!" there was a peculiar drawl in the cashier's voice as he spoke; "ah, I had a communication from

Mr. Porter yesterday, asking if the note had been paid."

Mortimer felt his knees shake—something was choking him. Had the devil of mischance taken the salvation of Alan's good name out of his hands—had his work been for nothing.

"I couldn't understand it," went on the cashier. His voice sounded like the clang of a fire bell to the listening man, though it was evenly modulated, cold and steady in its methodical precision. "I thought Porter knew the money was here to meet the note," said Lane, still speaking, "but my attention being called to the matter, I looked up the papers. I found one thousand dollars missing!" He was looking steadily at Mortimer; his eyes were searching the young man's very soul. There was accusation, denunciation, abhorrence in the cashier's gaze.

Mortimer did not speak. He was trying to think. His brain worked in erratic futility. The slangy babble of Old Bill thrust itself upon him; the roar of the race course was in his ears, deadening his senses; not a sane, relevant word rose to his lips. He was like a child stricken by fear. In an indistinct way he felt the dishonor that was Alan Porter's being given to him.

The cashier waited for Mortimer to say something; then he spoke again, with reproach in his voice.

"I at once sent a messenger to ask you to return from your home at Emerson to clear up this matter; he discovered that you had not been there; that your mother was not ill. May I ask where you were yesterday?"

"I was at Gravesend, sir—at the races," answered Mortimer, defiantly.

This speech broke the lethargy that was over him; his mind cleared—he commenced to think sanely.

"Can you tell me," proceeded Lane, "where the balance of Mr. Porter's three thousand dollars is?"

"It's in the box."

"That's a—it is not."

"It's in the box," repeated Mortimer, firmly.

"We can soon settle that point," declared the cashier, going hurriedly into the vault and reappearing instantly with the box in his hand.

He opened it and stared at the package of bills that rose up when freed from the pressure of the lid. With nervous fingers he counted the contents.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed in a quick, jerky way. "The three thousand dollars is here, but these bills have been put in the box this morning; they were not there last night. It is not the money that was taken away, either. That was one bill, a thousand-dollar note; and here are"—he counted them again—"six one hundreds and eight fifties, besides the original two of one thousand. You put those notes back, Mr. Mortimer," he said, tapping the desk with two fingers of the right hand.

"I did."

"And you took the money yesterday or the day before?"

"I did not."

"Ah!" Lane repeated in a drier, more severe tone than he had used before. This "Ah" of the cashier's, with its many gradations of tone, had been a most useful weapon in his innumerable financial battles. It could be made to mean anything—everything; flung out at haphazard it always caught his opponent off

guard; it was a subtle thrust, and while one pondered over its possible meaning, Lane could formulate in his mind more decisive expressions.

"Ah," he repeated, adding, "if you did not steal the money, who did? And if you did not take it, why did you put it back?"

With an expressive sweep of the hand outward the cashier stood waiting, his tall, narrow head, topped by carefully brushed gray hair, thrust forward in the attitude of a parrot about to strike with its beak.

"I can't answer those questions," answered the man he was grilling. "The money to pay Mr. Porter's note is here; and I fancy that is all the bank needs to concern itself about. It was entrusted to me, and now I am prepared to turn it over."

"Quite true; ah, yes, quite true; but it might have been vastly different. That is the point that most concerns the bank. Whoever took the money"—and he bowed, deprecatingly, with ironical consideration to Mortimer—"must have needed a thousand dollars for—well, some speculative purpose, perhaps. Good fortune has enabled the some one to make good, and the money has been replaced."

The cashier straightened up, threw his head back, and actually smiled. He had scored linguistically—by a clever manipulation of the sentence he had made the some one who had stolen the money the some one who who had replaced it. That was accusation by inference, if you like. As the other did not speak, Lane added: "I will wire for Mr. Crane to come at once; this is a matter for investigation."

Mortimer bowed his head in acquiesence; what could he say—what other stand could the bank take?

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

"You might remain at your desk," the cashier said, "if there is any mistake we'll discover it, no doubt."

Mortimer felt like one dead, indeed as a dishonored man he were better dead. The bank was like a mausoleum, and he a lost spirit haunting its precincts in quest of the undefiled body that had been his but yesterday. Cass, the teller, certainly shunned him as he would a leper. Lane, vindictively pleased that he had unearthed the villain, drew his small soul into a shell of cold, studious politeness; much as a sea spider might house his unpleasant body in a discarded castle of pink and white.

Alan Porter was late—he had not come yet. Mortimer waited in suffering suspense for his appearance. What would come of it all. Now that the money was replaced, if the boy admitted his guilt to Crane, probably no further action would be taken, but he would be dishonored in the sight of his employer. Mortimer had sought to avert this; had not denounced Alan in the first instance; by good fortune had been able to replace the money; even now had refused to divulge the name of the thief. He was well aware of the mass of circumstantial evidence, the outcome of his own hurried actions, that pointed to himself as the guilty one. Better this than that he should denounce the boy. Dishonor to the lad might kill his father; for Mortimer was well aware of the doctor's edict. And Allis, the girl he loved as his life, would hang her head in shame for evermore. He was anxious to see Alan before the cashier did; he did not want the boy to deny taking the money at first, as he might do if he were unaware of the circumstances; it would place him in a wrong light.

Just before twelve Alan Porter came hurriedly in. He had missed his train the night before, he explained in a general way to all. Mortimer stepped up to him almost at once, speaking with low, earnest rapidity; the cashier was in his own office and Mr. Cass was not within earshot.

"I put the money back, but its loss had been discovered yesterday. I have been accused of taking it, but have denied it, accusing no one. I want you to say that you borrowed it, thinking it no great harm, as it was your father's money."

Alan would have interrupted him, but Mortimer said, "Wait till I finish;" and then continued: "There will be nothing done to you, I feel sure, if you will take this stand, because of your father's connection with Crane. It will save me from dishonor—"

"Mr. Porter."

It was the cashier's voice of Damascus steel cutting in on Mortimer's low, pleading tones.

Alan turned his head, and Mr. Lane, beckoning, said, "Will you step into my office for a minute?"

The cashier's one minute drew its weary length into thirty; and when Alan Porter came out again, Mortimer saw the boy sought to avoid him. Had he denied taking the money? My God! the full horror of Mortimer's hopeless position flashed upon him like the lurid light of a destroying forest fire. He could read in every line of the boy's face an accusation of himself. He had trembled when it was a question of Alan's dishonor; now that the ignominy was being thrust upon him, the bravery that he possessed in great part made him a hero. If through his endeavor to save the boy he was to shoulder the guilt, not of his own volition, but without hope of

escape, he would stand to it like a man. What would it profit him to denounce the boy.

Harking back with rapidity over his actions, and Alan's, he saw that everything implicated him. Once he thought of his mother and wavered; but she would believe him if he said he had not committed this dreadful crime. But all the world of Brookfield would despise the name of her son if it were thought that he had sought to testify falsely against his friend. And was not Alan the brother of Allis?

Mentally his argument, his analysis of the proper course to pursue was tortuous, not definable, or to be explained in concise phraseology; but the one thought that rose paramount over all others was, that he must take his iniquitous punishment like a man. He had fought so strongly to shield the brother of the girl he loved that the cause in all its degradation had accrued to him.

At one o'clock the president, Crane, arrived from New York, and in him was bitterness because of his yesterday's defeat. He had sat nearly the whole night through mentally submerged in the double happening that had swept many men from the chess board. Lauzanne, the despised, had kept from his hand a small fortune, even when his fingers seemed tightening on the coin, too. That was one happening. John Porter had gained over twenty thousand dollars. This made him quite independent of Crane's financial bolstering. The Banker's diplomacy of love had been weakened. That was the other happening.

Crane was closeted with the cashier not more than ten minutes when Mortimer was asked to join the two men who had so suddenly become deeply interested in his affairs.

The cashier's hand had been strengthened by Crane's contribution of evidence. Mortimer had told the same falsehood about his mother being ill to him at the race course. From Alan the cashier had learned that Mortimer had been betting heavily; he had admitted to the boy that he had won enough to replace the thousand dollars he had stolen. Mortimer's words had been contorted into that reading in their journey through two personalities. He had even begged young Porter not to speak of his betting transactions. He had denied taking the money—that was but natural; he had been forced to admit replacing it—that was conclusive. Indeed it seemed a waste of time to investigate further; it was utterly impossible to doubt his guilt. Mesh by mesh, like an enthralling net, all the different threads of convicting circumstances were drawn about the accused man.

"Let us question him?" said Crane; and in his heart was not sorrow, nor hate, nor compassion, nor anything but just joy. Greater than the influence of money in his love ambition would be this degradation, this reducing to a felon a man he felt stood between him and Allis Porter.

Yesterday they had won; to-day victory, almost, to him had come. Yes, bring the deliverer in; he would feast his eyes, the narrow-lidded eyes, upon the man whose young love might have conquered over all his diplomacy, and who would go forth from his hands branded as a felon.

The probing of the already condemned man elicited nothing beyond a repeated denial of theft. With the precision of Mam'selle Guillotine, Cashier Lane lopped off everything that could possibly stand in Mortimer's

defense, grafting into the cleaved places individual facts which confirmed his guilt. Mortimer contended nothing, threw suspicion upon no one. Was it Alan Porter? Was it Cass?—but that was impossible. Was it the cashier himself? Still more impossible. Mortimer answered nothing. *He* had not taken the money. Yes, he had replaced it—because he was responsible for its custody.

"Can't you see," cried Crane, impatiently, "that this simple denial of yours is of no value as against so much that points to your—" he hesitated—"your implication?"

XL

WHILE Mortimer was still in the cashier's improvised inquisition room, Allis Porter came into the bank to arrange the payment of her father's note.

The sunshine seemed to come with her into the counting house that was all gloom. Her glorious success, the consequent improvement in her father, the power to pay off his indebtedness—all these had turned that day into a day of thankfulness. The happiness that was in her rippled her face into smiles. When the door creaked on its hinges as it swung open, she laughed. It was a thriftless old door, such as bachelors kept, she murmured. Her brother's face, gloomy behind the iron screen, tickled her fancy. "You're like a caged bear, Alan," she cried, with a smile of impertinence; "I should hate to be shut up a day like this—no wonder you're cross, brother."

"I'm busy," he answered, curtly. "I'll see you after bank hours, Sis; I want to see you."

"I've come to pay father's note, busy-man-of-importance," she flung back, with the swagger of a capitalist.

"It's paid, Allis."

"Paid! I thought—"

"Wait, I'll come out;" and opening a door in the rail, he passed around to the girl.

"Father's note is paid," he resumed, "but there's fierce trouble over it. Crane left the money, three thousand dollars, with Mortimer, and he stole"—the boy's voice

lowered to a hoarse whisper—"a thousand of it to bet at Gravesend."

"That's not true, Alan; God knows it's not true. Mortimer wouldn't steal."

"Yes, he did," persisted the brother, "and he begged of me to take the blame. He said it would ruin him, but that Crane wouldn't do anything to me. He's a vile, sneaking thief, Allis!"

"Hush, Alan; don't say that. It's all some dreadful mistake. The money will be found somewhere."

"It has been found; Mortimer put it back. Why should he replace the money if he had not stolen it?"

"Where is Mr. Mortimer, Alan?"

The boy pointed with his thumb to the door of the cashier's office. "Crane's in there, too. I hope Mortimer owns up. He can't do anything else; they caught him putting the money back."

Allis remembered that she had seen Mortimer on the race course.

"Mr. Mortimer doesn't bet," she said.

"Yes, he does; he did yesterday, anyway; and when he saw that I knew about it, he begged me to say nothing—practically admitted that he had taken the money, and was going to put it back."

"Why should he tell you that, Alan?"

"I don't know, unless he feared it might be found out while he was away; or, perhaps he was so excited over winning a thousand dollars that he didn't know what he was saying. At any rate, he took it right enough, Allis, and you ought to cut him."

"I sha'n't do that. He's innocent, I know he is—I don't care what they say. If he replaced the money, it was to shield the man who took it." She was looking

searchingly into her brother's eyes—not that she was accusing him of the theft, she was just searching for the truth.

"Do you mean it was to shield me—that I took it? No one could have taken the money except Mortimer or myself."

"I don't know," answered the girl, wearily; "it's all so terribly new; I only know that Mortimer did not steal it."

While she was still speaking, the accused man came from the cashier's office, holding his head as erect as an Indian, not at all as a half-convicted felon should have slunk through the door; yet withal in his face was a look of troubled gravity.

When Mortimer saw Allis his face flushed, then went pale in an instant. He felt that she knew; he had seen her talking earnestly to her brother. Probably she, too, would think him a thief. He admitted to himself that the evidence was sufficient to destroy anyone's faith in his innocence, and he was helpless, quite helpless; he was limited to simple denial, unless he accused her brother; even had he been so disposed, there was nothing to back up a denunciation of the boy. He felt a twinge of pain over Alan's ingratitude; the latter must know that he had put his neck in a noose to save him. Now that one of them needs be dishonored, why did not Alan prove himself a man, a Porter—they were a hero breed—and accept the gage of equity. Even worse, Alan was shielding himself behind this terrible bulwark of circumstantial evidence which topped him, the innocent one, on every side.

As he resumed his place at his desk close to the brother and sister, Alan looked defiantly at him. He could see in

the boy's eyes malignant detestation, a glimmer of triumph, as though he felt that Mortimer was irrevocably in the toils. The lad was like a strippling Judas; his attitude filled Mortimer with loathing. He stole a look into the girl's face. Would she, too, say with her eyes, "Behold, here is Barabbas!"

A thrill of ecstatic comfort warmed his being. In Allis's eyes was the first touch of kindness he had known in this hour of trial; faith, and sorrow, and cheer, and love were all there, striving for mastery; no furtive weakening, no uncertain questioning, no remonstrance of reproval—nothing but just unlimited faith and love. If the boy's look had angered him, had caused him to waver, had made the self-sacrifice seem too great when repaid with ingratitude, all these thoughts vanished in an instant, obliterated by that one look of unalterable love. In the hour of darkness the girl stood by him, and he would also stand firm. She would believe in him, and his sacrifice would be as nothing. He had undertaken to avert the sorrow of dishonor from her, from her brother, from her parents, and he would continue to the end. He would tell no one on earth but his mother the full truth; she must know. Then with the faith of the two women he loved, still his, he could brave the judgment of all others. Perhaps not willingly in the first place would be have taken upon himself the brand of Barrabas, but out of good motive he had incurred it.

Mortimer heard the brother say, "I think you had better not," then the girl's voice, clear and decisive, answering, "I will, I must."

In anger Alan left his sister's side, and she, stepping up to the wicket, said, "Will you please come out for a minute, Mr. Mortimer, I want to speak with you."

He passed around to her side. Crane and the cashier were still closeted in the latter's office.

"Let us go out into the sunshine," Allis said. "Can you—will it make any difference?"

"I don't think it matters much," he answered, despondently; "things are as bad as they can be, I suppose."

He took it for granted that she knew everything; but he was possessed of no shame, no diffidence, no reserve; he was innocent, and her eyes had assured him that she knew it. As they passed through the door it creaked again on its dry hinges. Before she had laughed at the weird complaining; now it sounded like a moan of misery. Outside the village street was deserted; there was no one to listen.

"What is this dreadful thing all about?" and she laid her hand on his arm in a gesture of amity, of association. Her touch thrilled him; she had never gone that length in friendly demonstration before. He marveled at her generous faith. All but dishonored, the small, strong hand lifted him to a pedestal—her eyes deified him.

"A thousand dollars was stolen from the bank, and I am accused of taking it," he answered, bitterly.

"You didn't, did you? I know you didn't, but I want to hear you say so."

He looked full into the girl's eye, and answered with deliberate earnestness, "I did not steal the money."

"Some one took it?"

"Yes."

"And you know who it was?"

"I do not."

"But you suspect some one?"

He did not answer.

"Did you put the money back?"

He nodded his head.

"To protect somebody's good name?"

"Because it had been in my charge. I can't talk about it," he broke in, vehemently; "all I can say is, that I am innocent. If you believe that I don't care what they do. They'll be able to prove by circumstantial evidence that I took it," he added, bitterly, "and nothing that I can say will make any difference. My mother won't believe me guilty, and, thank God, you don't; and I am not; God knows I am not. Beyond that I will say nothing; it is useless—worse than useless; it would be criminal—would only cast suspicion on others, perhaps innocent. I don't know what they'll do about it; the money has been repaid. They may arrest me as a felon—at any rate I shall be forced to leave the bank and go away. It won't make much difference—I am as I was before, an honest man, and I shall find other openings. It's not half so hard as I thought it would be; I feared perhaps that you—"

She stopped him with an imploring gesture.

"Let me finish," he said. "I must go back to the office. I thought that you might believe me a thief, and that would have been too much."

"You cared for my poor opinion?" she asked. The quiver in her voice caused him to look into her face; he saw the gray eyes shrouded in tears. He was a queer thief, trembling with joy because of his sin.

"Yes, I care," he answered; "and it seemed all so dark before you brought the sunlight in with you; now I'm glad that they've accused me; somebody else might have suffered and had no one to believe in him. But I must go back to—my prison it seems like now—when I leave you;" this with a weary attempt at brave mockery.

Allis laid a detaining hand on his arm, the small gloved hand that had guided Lauzanne to victory. "If anything happens, if you are going away—I think you are right to go if they distrust you—you will see me before you leave, won't you?"

"Will you care to see me if I stand branded as a thief?" The word came very hard, but in his acridity he felt like not sparing himself; he wanted to get accustomed to the full obloquy.

"Promise me to come to Ringwood before going away," she answered.

"Yes, I will; and I thank you. No matter how dark the shadow may make my life your kindness will be a hope light. No man is utterly lost when a good woman believes in him."

The creaking bank door wailed tremulously, irritably; somebody was pushing it open from the inside. With a whine of remonstrance it swung wider, and Crane stepped out on the sidewalk. He stared in astonishment at Mortimer and Allis, his brow wrinkled in anger. Only for an instant; the forehead smoothed back into its normal placidity and his voice, well in hand, said, in even tones: "Good afternoon, Miss Porter. Are you going back to Ringwood?" and he nodded toward Allis's buggy.

"Yes, I am. I'm going now. Good day, Mr. Mortimer," and she held out her hand.

Mortimer hesitated, and then, flushing, took the gloved fingers in his own. Without speaking, he turned and passed into the bank.

"May I go with you?" asked Crane; "I want to see your father."

"Yes, I shall be glad to drive you over," the girl answered.

XLI

WHEN they had passed the edge of the village the Banker said: "I doubt if you would have shaken hands with Mr. Mortimer if you knew—I mean, he is under strong suspicion, more than strong suspicion, for he is practically self-accused of having stolen a sum of money from the bank. In fact, I'm not sure that it wasn't from your father he really stole it."

"I do know of this terrible thing," she answered. "I shook hands with him because I believe him innocent."

"You know more than we do?" It was not a sneer; if so, too delicately veiled for detection; the words were uttered in a tone of hopeful inquiry.

"Mr. Mortimer could not steal—it is impossible."

"Have you sufficient grounds for your faith—do you happen to know who took the money, for it was stolen?"

The girl did not answer at once. At first her stand had simply been one of implicit faith in the man she had conjured into a hero of all that was good and noble. She had not cast about for extenuating evidence; she had not asked herself who the guilty man was; her faith told her it was morally impossible for Mortimer to become a thief. Now Crane's questions, more material than the first deadening effects of Alan's accusation, started her mind on a train of thought dealing with motive possibilities.

She knitted her small brows, and tapping the jogging

horse's quarter with the whip sat for many minutes silently absorbed.

Her companion waited for an answer with his usual well-bred patience. Perhaps the girl had not heard him. Perhaps she did not wish to answer a question so unanswerable. He waited.

Mortimer, being innocent, replaced the stolen money, Allis's mind tabulated—she tickled this thought off on the horse with her whip—it was to shield some one. Her heart told her, his eyes had told her, that he would have taken upon himself this great risk but for one person, her brother. Yes, Mortimer was a hero! The horse, lazily going, jumped a little in the traces; she had struck him a harder tap with the whip. Allis continued her mental summing up. Why did Mortimer go to Gravesend? It must have been to see Alan—the boy was there. If he had discovered that the money was missing, and thought Alan had taken it, he would do this; if he had suspected some other person he would have made the matter known to the cashier. He did not replace the money at once, because he hadn't it. She knew that Mortimer was poor. He had failed to find Alan until after Lauzanne's victory; her brother had told her this much, and that Mortimer had won a lot of money over the horse. Why he had bet on Lauzanne she knew not; perhaps Providence had guided, had helped him that much. But surely that was the money, his winnings, with which he had replaced the thousand dollars.

The girl's mind had worked methodically, following sequence of action to sequence, until finally the conviction that Mortimer had sought to shield her brother, and chance or Providence working through herself

and Lauzanne had placed in his hands the necessary funds, came to her as fixedly as though the whole past panorama of events lay pictured before her eyes.

She saw all this mentally; but would it avail anything in actuality? If the boy disclaimed guilt, as he had; if Mortimer limited his defense to a simple denial, refusing to implicate her brother, what could she do except give her moral support? To her it seemed such a small reward for his heroism; her faith would not save him from the brand of felony, and to follow out her convictions publicly she must denounce her brother, cast upon him the odium of theft. Truly her position was one of extreme hopelessness. Two men she loved stood before her mentally, one accused of others as a thief, and one—her own brother—charged by her reason with the crime.

Under the continued silence Crane grew restless; the girl, almost oblivious of his presence, deep in the intricacies of the crime, gave no sign of a desire to pursue the discussion.

"Of course I am anxious to clear the young man if he is innocent," hazarded the banker, to draw her gently back into the influence that he felt must be of profit to himself. This assertion of Crane's was only assimilatively truthful. As president of the bank, naturally he should wish to punish none other than the guilty man; as a rival to Mortimer for the girl's affection, he could not but be pleased to see the younger man removed from his path, and in a way which would forever preclude his aspiring to Allis's hand. Believe in Mortimer as she might, he felt sure that she would not run counter to the inevitable wishes of her mother and marry a man who stood publicly branded as a thief.

Allis answered his observation—he distinctly felt the vibration of pain in her voice—with a startling depth of analytical discernment:

"While I believe in Mortimer's innocence, and will always believe in it, I am afraid that he has drawn such a web of circumstantial evidence about him, trying to shield some one else, that—that—it is too terrible!" she broke off, passionately—"he *is* innocent. For God's sake, Mr. Crane"—she took the reins in her whip hand, and put her left on his arm, pleadingly—"for God's sake, for his mother's sake, save him. You can do it—you can believe that he is innocent, and stop everything. The money has been paid back."

"It isn't that, Miss Allis"—his voice was so cuttingly even after the erratic pump of her own—"in a bank one must not have a dishonest person. We must investigate to the end, and if Mortimer can clear himself by fastening the crime upon the perpetrator—"

"He will never do that; he cannot if he would."

"What can I do then, Miss Allis? But why shouldn't he?"

"Can't you see—don't you understand the man? He commenced by shielding some one, and he will carry it through to the bitter end."

"I am afraid there was no one to shield but himself—everything points to this conclusion. The money was locked up, he had the keys, no one touched them—except your brother, and that but for a minute—but if any suspicion could attach to your brother it is all dissipated by Mortimer's subsequent actions. It's unpleasant to even hint at such a contingency, but if Mortimer is innocent, then your brother must be the guilty one."

He expected the girl to denounce indignantly such a possibility; he was surprised that she remained silent. Her non-refutation of this deduction told him as conclusively as though she had uttered the accusation that she thought Alan had taken the money and Mortimer was shielding him. It was but a phase of blind love; it was the faith women place in men they love, of which he had read and scoffed at.

Against all evidence she was holding this man honest, believing her brother the thief.

Surely a love like that was worth winning; no price was too great to pay. Her very faith in Mortimer, through which she sought to save him by inspiring Crane, determined the latter to crush utterly the man who stood between him and this great love. Intensity of hate, or love, or cupidity, never drew Crane out of his inherent diplomacy; he took refuge behind the brother of Allis.

"You see," he said, and his voice was modulated with kindness, "I can't save Mortimer except at the expense of Alan; you would not have me do that. Besides, it is impossible—the evidence shines as clear as noonday."

"If you bring this home to Mr. Mortimer you will punish him, arrest him?"

"That would be the usual course."

She had taken her hand off his arm; now she replaced it, and he could feel the strong fingers press as though she would hold him to her wishes.

"You will not do this," she said, "for my sake you will not."

"You ask this of me, and it is for your sake?"

"Yes, if there is no other way; if Mr. Mortimer, in-

nocent, must take upon himself this crime, then for my sake you will not punish him."

The gray eyes were violet-black in their intensity.

"If I promise—" He had been going to ask for reward, but she broke in, saying: "You will keep your word, and I will bless you."

"Nothing more—is that all?"

The magnetism of the intense eyes broke down his reserve; he slipped back twenty years in a second. Love touched him with a fire-wand, and his soul ignited. Cold, passionless Philip Crane spoke in a tongue, unfamiliar as it was to him, that carried conviction to the girl—just the conviction that he was in earnest, that he was possessed of a humanizing love. She listened patiently while he pleaded his cause with much mastery. It was beyond her understanding, that, though Mortimer through all time had spoken not at all of love to her—at least not in the passionate words that came from this man's lips—yet she now heard as though it were his voice and not Crane's. Love *was* a glorious thing—with Mortimer.

Crane's intensity availed nothing. When he asked why she held faith to a man who must be known for all time as a thief, her soul answered, "It is nothing—because he is innocent."

Because of her Crane would do anything; the matter should be dropped as though it were all a hideous mistake. Mortimer might remain in the bank; his employer would even try to believe him innocent, taking the girl's protestation as conclusive proof. Her mother, her father, everyone would demand of her, however, that she give the dishonest one up as a possibility. Even in his vehemence he lost no delicacy of

touch. Why should she chain herself to an impossibility? It would but ruin the man she professed to regard.

The banker made no threat, but Allis shuddered. She knew. The narrow-lidded eyes had closed perceptibly when their owner talked of the alternative. He, Crane, loved her—she felt that was true. He was rich; for her father, for her brother, for herself, even for Mortimer, he would use his wealth. He pleaded his cause like a strong man, and when he spoke of failure because of her preference for Mortimer, an acridity crept into his voice that meant relentless prosecution.

She could not hold this full power over Crane without feeling its value. To pledge herself to him as wife was impossible; she could not do it; she would not. Fate played into his hands without doubt, but Fate was not Providence. A decree of this sort, iniquitous, was not a higher command, else she would not feel utter abhorrence of the alliance. Paradoxically the more vehemently Crane's love obtruded itself the more obnoxious it became; it was something quite distinct from the man's own personality. She did not detest him individually, for the honesty of his love impressed her; mentally she separated Crane from his affection, and while rejecting his love absolutely as a compelling factor, appealed to him as a man having regard for her, a woman he believed in.

It was a most delicate cleavage, yet unerringly she attained to its utmost point of discrimination. Perhaps it was the strength of her love for Mortimer that enabled her to view so calmly this passionate declaration. A year before, unsophisticated as she had been, it would have thrown her into an agitated confusion, but she

was developing rapidly; responsibility had tempered fine the great will power which was hers in such a marked degree.

"I am sorry, Mr. Crane," she began, conventionally enough, "I *am* sorry; I couldn't marry a man without loving him. What you have just told me must win regard for you, because I know that you feel strongly, and I think any woman should take an offer of honest love as the greatest of all compliments."

"But I don't even ask for your love now," he interrupted.

"Ah, but you should. You shouldn't marry a woman unless she loves you. At any rate I feel that way about it. Of course, if there were a chance of my coming to care for you in that way we could wait, but it would be deceiving you to give hope."

"Is it because you care for Mortimer?" he asked.

"I think it is. I suppose if I am to help him I must be quite honest with you. I do not want to talk about it—it seems too sacred. I have even spoken less to Mr. Mortimer of love," she added, with a painful attempt at a smile. "You have said that you care for me, Mr. Crane, and I believe you; you have been generous to my father, also. Now won't you promise me something, just for the sake of this regard? I suppose it is impossible to prove Mr. Mortimer's innocence"—she felt her own helplessness, and who else could or would care to accomplish it—"but it is in your power to lessen the evil. Won't you take my word that he is innocent and stop everything? As you say, either he or Alan must be suspected, and if it were brought home to my brother it would crush me, and my mother and father."

"What can I do?"

"Just nothing. I know Mr. Mortimer has determined to accept the disgrace, and he will go away. You can make his load as light as possible, for my sake."

The small hand on his arm was drawing him to acquiesence. He did not answer at once, but sat moodily diagnosing his position. If he refused and prosecuted Mortimer, the girl, more determined than many men, would change from a state of possibility, from simply not loving him, to a vigorous hate. If he hushed the matter up Mortimer would go away under a cloud, and his removal from the presence of Allis might effect a change in her regard. He would accelerate this wished-for elision of love by procuring absolutely indisputable proof of Mortimer's dishonesty. He saw his opening to that end; he could do it under the guise of clearing the innocent one of the suspected two; for Allis alone this would be. To him there was not the slightest ground for supposing Alan had taken the money, but blinded by her love, evidently Allis thought Mortimer was shielding her brother. Though it was to Crane's best interests, he pretended to consent out of pure chivalry. "What you ask," he said, "is very little; I would do a thousand times more for you. There is nothing you could ask of me that would not give me more pleasure than anything else in my barren life. But I could not bear to see you wedded to Mortimer; he is not worthy—you are too good for him. I don't say this because he is more fortunate, but I love you and want to see you happy."

The girl was like a slim poplar. The strong wind of Crane's clever pleading and seeming generosity swayed

her from her rigid attitude only to spring back again, to stand straight and beautiful, true to her love and faith in Mortimer.

"You are kind to me," she said, simply; "I wish I could repay you."

"Perhaps some day I may get a reward out of all proportion to this small service."

She looked fair into his eyes, and on her lips hovered a weak, plaintive, wistful smile, as though she were wishing he could accept the inevitable and take her regard, her gratitude, her good opinion of him and not wed himself to a chimera which would bring only weariness of spirit in return for his goodness.

"You will be repaid some day," she answered, "for I feel that Mr. Mortimer's name will be cleared, and you will be glad that you acted generously."

"Well, this will give him a better chance," he said, evasively; "it's not good to crush a man when he's down. I will see that no one connected with the bank shows him the slightest disrespect. Of course he'll have to go, he couldn't remain under the circumstances —he wouldn't."

The horse had jogged slowly. Allis had purposely allowed the old Bay to take his time. Unused to such a tolerance he had scandalously abused the privilege; once or twice he had even cast longing glances at a succulent bunch of grass growing by the roadside, as though it were a pure waste of opportunity to neglect the delicacy for work when he had to do with such indifferent overseers. But now Ringwood was in sight, and there was still the matter of the money that had been paid on her father's note to speak of. She asked Crane where it had come from.

"You won it over Diablo in the Brooklyn Handicap," he answered, bluntly.

"You won it," she corrected him; "I refused to accept it."

"I remember that eccentricity," he replied. "I'm a busy man, and having the money thrown back on my hands, as it was not mine, caused me considerable inconvenience. I deposited three thousand of it against the note to save both your father and myself needless worry. There are still some hundreds due you, and I wish you would please tell me what I am to do with it."

"I'd rather pay you back the three thousand now."

"I can't accept it. I have enough money of my own to worry along on."

"Well, I wash my hands of the whole affair. When father gets stronger he must settle it."

They had turned into the drive to Ringwood House.

"We are home now," she added, "and I want to say again that I'll never forget your kind promise. I know you will not repent of your goodness."

Mrs. Porter saw Allis and Crane together in the buggy; it pleased the good woman vastly. Allis's success with Lauzanne had taken a load from her spirits. She was not mercenary, but there had been so much at stake. Now in one day Providence had averted disaster, and she had awakened from a terrible nightmare of debt. The sunshine of success had warmed her husband's being into hopeful activity, a brightness was over his spirits that had not been there for months. It was like an augury of completed desire that Crane should come the day of their good fortune with Allis. If she would but marry him there would be little left to worry about. So it was that Crane, perplexed by his

recent love check, and Allis, mired in gloom over her hero's misfortune, stepped into a radiancy of exotic cheerfulness.

The girl bravely sought to shake off her gloom, chiding her heavy heart for its unfilial lack of response. Crane, accustomed to mental athletics, tutored his mind into a seeming exuberance, and playfully alluded to his own defeat at the hands of Allis and the erratic Lauzanne. There was no word of the bank episode, nothing but a pæan of victory.

Crane's statement to Allis that he was going out to Ringwood to see her father was only an excuse. He soon took his departure, a stable-boy driving him back to the village. There he had a talk with the cashier. Mortimer was to be asked to resign his position as soon as his place in the bank could be filled. No further prosecution was to be taken against him unless Crane decided upon such a course. "In the meantime you can investigate cautiously," he said, "and keep quite to yourself any new evidence that may turn up. So far as Mr. Mortimer is concerned, the matter is quite closed."

The cashier had always considered his employer a hard man, and, in truth, who hadn't? He could scarcely understand this leniency; he had expected a vigorous prosecution of Mortimer; had almost dreaded its severity. Personally he had no taste for it; still, he would feel insecure if the suspected man, undeniably guilty, were to remain permanently in the bank. His dismissal from the staff was a wise move, tempered by unexpected clemency. If there were not something behind it all—this contingency always attached itself to Crane's acts—his employer had acted with fine, wise discrimination.

XLII

CRANE returned to New York, his mind working smoothly to the hum of the busy wheels beneath his coach.

This degrading humiliation of his rival must certainly be turned to account. With Allis Porter still believing in Mortimer's innocence the gain to him was very little; he must bring the crime absolutely home to the accused man, but in a manner not savoring of persecution, else the girl's present friendly regard would be turned into abhorrence. In addition to this motive he felt an inclination to probe the matter to its utmost depths. It was not his nature to leave anything to conjecture; in all his transactions each link in the chain of preparation for execution was welded whole. He felt that it would be but a matter of manipulation to environ Mortimer completely with the elements of his folly. He firmly believed him guilty; Allis, misled by her infatuation, mentally attributed the peculation to her brother.

The Banker would go quietly to work and settle this point beyond dispute. He might have hesitated, leaving well enough alone, had he been possessed of any doubts as to the ultimate results of his investigation, but he wasn't. He reasoned that Mortimer had taken the thousand-dollar note thinking to win three or four thousand at least over his horse, The Dutchman, and then replace the abstracted money. Crane was aware that Alan Porter had told Mortimer of The Dutchman's almost certain

prospect of winning; in fact, the boy had suggested that Mortimer had taken it for this purpose. Mortimer would not have changed the note; would have taken it straight to the race course. He must have lost it to some bookmaker over The Dutchman. Crane knew the number of the stolen note. The three one-thousand-dollar bills were new, running in consecutive numbers, B 67,482-83-84; he had noticed that quite by chance at the time; it was the middle one, B 67,483, that was missing. So he had a possible means of identifying the man who had taken the money. Mentally he followed Mortimer during the day at Gravesend. From Alan he knew of his winnings over Lauzanne.

Crane reasoned that Mortimer, having risked the thousand on his horse, had been told that Lauzanne might win. This had perhaps frightened him, and being unfamiliar with the folly of such a course had backed two horses in the same race—had put a hundred on Lauzanne at ten to one to cover his risk on The Dutchman, feeling this made him more secure. He would either win a considerable stake or have sufficient in hand to cover up his defalcation. The first thing to do was to find the note if possible. Faust would be the man for this commission.

Immediately upon his arrival in New York, Crane telephoned for Faust, asking him to bring his betting sheet for the second last day of the Brooklyn Meet. When Faust arrived at Crane's quarters the latter said, "I want to trace a thousand-dollar note, number B 67,483. I think it was betted on the Brooklyn Derby, probably on my horse."

Faust consulted his betting sheet, Crane looking over his shoulder. "I didn't have no thousand in one bet on that race," he said.

"What are those figures," asked the other, pointing to two consecutive numbers of one thousand each.

"That was the other way about," answered the Bookmaker; "that was pay. A thousand to one hundred twice over Lauzanne. I think it must have been stable money, for one of the guys was like a big kid; he didn't know 'nough to pick a winner in a thousand years."

The coincidence of this amount with the win attributed to Mortimer, appealed to Crane's fancy. "You remember the man who made this bet, then?" he asked.

"Yes, sure thing. There was two of 'em, as you see. I remember him because it took some explainin' to get the bet through his noddle. He was a soft mark for a bunco steerer. I've seen some fresh kids playin' the horses, but he had 'em all beat to a standstill. It must a-been first-time luck with him, for he cashed."

"Can you describe him?"

The Cherub drew an ornate verbal picture, florid in its descriptive phraseology, but cognate enough to convince Crane it was Mortimer who had made one of the bets. His preconceived plan of the suspected man's operations was working out.

"Now find this thousand-dollar note for me," he said; "take trouble over it; get help if necessary; go to every bookmaker that was in line that day. If you find the note, exchange other money for it and bring it to me."

"There may be a chance," commented Faust, scratching his fat poll meditatively; "the fellows like to keep these big bills, they're easier in the pocket than a whole bundle of flimsies. The next day was get-away-day, an' they wouldn't be payin' out much. I'll make a play fer it."

The next afternoon Faust reported at Crane's rooms with the rescued note in his possession. He had been successful.

"I give a dozen of 'em a turn," he said, "before I run again' Jimmie Farrell. He had it snuggled away next his chest among a lot of yellow-backs, good Dutchman money."

"Does he know who bet it?"

"Not his name—some stranger; he'd know him if he saw him, he says."

Crane grasped this new idea with avidity, the scent was indeed getting hot. Why not take Farrell down to Brookfield to identify Mortimer. He had expected the searching for evidence would be a tedious matter; his fortunate star was guiding him straight and with rapidity to the goal he sought.

"I'm much obliged to you," he said to Faust. "I won't trouble you further; I'll see Farrell myself. Give me his address."

That evening the Banker saw Farrell. "There was a little crooked work over that thousand Faust got from you," he said, "an' if you could find time to go with me for an hour's run into the country, I think you could identify the guilty party."

"I can go with you," Farrell answered, "but it's just a chance in a thousand. I should be on the block down at Sheepshead, but, to tell you the truth, the hot pace the backers set me at Brooklyn knocked me out a bit. I'm goin' to take a breather for a few days an' lay again' 'em next week. Yes, I'll go with you, Mr. Crane."

In the morning the two journeyed to Brookfield.

"I won't go to the bank with you," Crane said; "I wish you would go in alone. You may make any excuse

you like, or none at all. Just see if the man you got this note from is behind the rail. I'll wait at the hotel."

In fifteen minutes he was rejoined by Farrell.

"Well?" he asked.

"He's there, right enough."

"A short dark little chap?" questioned Crane, hesitatingly, putting Alan Porter forward as a feeler.

"No. A tall fellow with a mustache."

"You are sure?"

"Dead sure, unless he's got a double, or a twin brother."

Crane felt that at last he had got indisputable proof; evidence that would satisfy even Allis Porter. He experienced little exhilaration over the discovery—he had been so sure before—yet his hand was strengthened vastly. Whatever might be the result of his suit with Allis, this must convince her that Mortimer was guilty, and unworthy of her love. There was also satisfaction in the thought that it quite cleared Alan of his sister's suspicion.

How he would use this confirmation Crane hardly knew; it would come up in its own proper place at the right time, no doubt.

"We can go back now," he said to Farrell; "we may as well walk leisurely to the station; we can get a train" —he pulled out his watch—"in twenty minutes."

Crane had made up his mind not to show himself at the bank that day. He wished to hold his discovery quite close within himself—plan his course of action with habitual caution. It meant no increased aggression against Mortimer's liberty; it was of value only in his pursuit of Allis Porter.

As they walked slowly toward the station Crane met

abruptly the girl who was just then so much in his thoughts. Her sudden appearance quite startled him, though it was quite accidental. She had gone in to do some shopping, she explained, after Crane's greeting.

Farrell continued on when his companion stopped. A sudden determination to tell the girl what he had unearthed took quick possession of Crane. His fine sense of reasoning told him that though she professed positive faith in Mortimer, she must have moments of wavering; it seemed only human. Perhaps his presiding deity had put this new weapon in his hands to turn the battle.

He began by assuring her that he had prosecuted the inquiry simply through a desire to establish the innocence of either Mortimer or her brother, or, if possible, both.

"You understand," he said, quite simply, "that Alan is like a brother—" he was going to say "son," but it struck him as being unadvisable, it aged him. He related how he had traced the stolen note, how he had discovered it, how he had brought the bookmaker down, and how, without guidance from him, Farrell had gone into the bank and identified Mortimer as the man who had betted the money.

"It clears Alan," he said, seeking furtively for a look into the drooping face.

The bright sun struck a sparkle of light from something that shot downward and splashed in the dust. The girl was crying.

"I'm sorry," he offered as atonement. "Perhaps I shouldn't have told you; it's too brutal."

The head drooped still lower.

"I shouldn't have spoken had it not been for your brother's sake. I didn't mean to. It was chance drew

you across my path just now. Though it is cruel, it is better that you should know. No man has a right to deceive you, you are too good. It is this very constancy and goodness that has taught me to love you."

"Don't," she pleaded; "I can't bear it just now. Please don't talk of love, don't talk of anything. Can't you see —can't you understand?"

"Yes, I know—you are suffering, but it is unjust; you are not fair to yourself. If this man would steal money, what difference would your love make to him? He would be as unfaithful to you as he has been to his trust in the bank. You must consider yourself—you must give him up; you can't link your young, beautiful life to a man who is only saved from the penitentiary because of your influence."

"Don't talk that way, Mr. Crane, please don't. I know you think that what you say is right, but what difference does it all make to me? You know what love is like, you say it has come to you now. My heart tells me that Mortimer is guiltless. The time has been so short that he has had no chance to clear himself. If I didn't believe in him I wouldn't love him; but I still love him, and so I believe in him. I can't help it—I don't want to help it; I simply go on having faith in him, and my love doesn't falter. Can't you understand what a terrible thing it would be even if I were to consent to become your wife? I know it would please my mother. But if afterward this other man was found to be innocent, wouldn't your life be embittered—wouldn't it be terrible for you to be tied to a woman who loved another man?"

"But it is impossible that he is innocent, or will ever be thought so."

"And I know that he is innocent."

"Your judgment must tell you that this is only fancy."

"My heart tells me that he is not guilty of this crime. My heart is still true to him; so, shall I decide against myself? Don't—don't stab me to death with words of Mortimer's guilt; it has no effect, and only gives me pain. I must wait—we must all wait, just wait. There is no harm in waiting, the truth will come out at last. But you will keep your promise?" she said, lifting her eyes to his face.

"Yes, I meant no harm to Mortimer in searching for this evidence; it was only to clear your brother."

They had come to the station by now.

"Would you like to speak to Mr. Farrell?" Crane asked. "You are taking my word."

"No, it is useless. I can do nothing but wait; that I can and will do."

"Don't think me cruel," Crane said, "but the wait will be so long."

"It may be forever, but I will wait. And I thank you again for your—for your goodness to me. I'm sorry that I've given you trouble. If you can—if you can—make it easier for Mortimer—I know he'll feel it if you could make him think that you didn't altogether believe him a—a—dishonest—will you, for my sake?"

It was generally supposed that Crane's heart had been mislaid at his inception and the void filled with a piece of chiseled marble; for years he was a convert to this belief himself; but as he stood on the platform of the primitive little station and looked into the soft luminous gray eyes, swimming moist in the hard-restrained tears of the pleading girl, he became a child. What a wondrous thing love was! Mountains were as mole-hills be-

fore such faith. In the unlimited power of her magnetism, what a trifle she had asked of him! With an influence so great she had simply said, "Spare of censure this man for my sake." In thankfulness rather than in condescension he promised.

Even in disgrace—a felon—how Mortimer was to be envied! Above all else was such abiding love. In his, Crane's, victory was the bitterness of defeat; the other, beaten down, triumphed in the gain of this priceless love.

A sharp material whistle, screeching through its brass dome on the incoming train, cut short these fantastically chaotic thoughts.

"Good-bye, and thank you," said the girl, holding out her hand to Crane.

"Good-bye," he repeated, mechanically.

What had he accomplished? He had beaten lower his rival and wedded firmer to the beaten man the love he prized above all else. In his ears rang the girl's words, "Wait, wait, wait." Irresponsibly he repeated to himself, "All things come to them that wait."

Seated in the car swift whirled toward the city, he was almost surprised to find Farrell by his side. He was like a man in a dream. A vision of gray eyes, blurred in tears of regret, had obliterated all that was material. In defeat his adversary had the victory. He, Philip Crane, the man of calculation, was but a creature of emotion. Bah! At forty if a man chooses to assume the role of Orlando he does it to perfection.

With an effort he swept away the cobweb of dreams and sat upright—Philip Crane, the careful planner.

"You nearly missed the train," said Farrell.

"Did I?" questioned Crane, perplexedly. "I thought I got on in plenty of time."

Farrell smiled knowingly, as befitted a man of his occupation—a New Yorker, up to snuff. The veiled insinuation disgusted Crane. Was everything in the world vile? He had left a young life swimming hopelessly in the breakers of disaster, buoyed only by faith and love; and at his side sat a man who winked complacently, and beamed upon him with senile admiration because of his supposed gallantry.

Perhaps a year before this moral angularity would not have affected him; it would not have appealed to him as being either clever or objectionable; he would simply not have noticed it at all. But Allis Porter had originated a revolution in his manner of thought. He even fought against the softer awakening; it was like destroying the lifelong habits of a man. His callousness had been a shield that had saved him troublous misgivings; behind this shield, even in rapacity, he had experienced peace of mind, absence of remorse. If he could have put away from him his love for the girl he would have done so willingly. Why should he battle and strive for an unattainable something as intangible as a dream? It was so paradoxical that Allis's love for Mortimer seemed hopeless because of the latter's defeat, while his, Crane's love, was equally hopeless in his hour of victory.

Farrell's voice drew him from this psychological muddle in tones that sounded harsh as the cawing of homing ravens at eventime.

"Will it be a court case?" he queried.

"What?" asked Crane, from his tangled elysium.

"That high roller in the bank."

"Oh! I can't say yet what it will lead to." Crane's caution always asserted itself first.

"Well, I've been thinking it over. That's the guy,

right enough, but when it comes to swearing to a man's identity in court, it's just a bit ticklish."

Crane frowned. He disliked men who hedged. He always planned first, then plunged; evidently his companion had plunged first, and was now verifying his plans.

Farrell continued, "You see what I mean?"

"I don't," answered Crane, shortly.

"You will if you wait," advised Farrell, a tinge of asperity in his tone. "I'm makin' a book, say. All the blazin' idiots in Christendom is climbin' over me wantin' to know what I'll lay this and what I'll lay that. They're like a lot of blasted mosquitos. A rounder comes up an' makes a bet; if it's small p'r'aps I don't twig his mug at all, just grabs the dough an' calls his number. He may be Rockefeller, or a tough from the Bowery, it don't make no difference to me; all I want is his goods an' his number, see? But a bettor of the right sort slips in an' taps me for odds to a thousand. Nat'rally I'm interested, because he parts with the thousand as though it was his heart's blood. I size him up. There ain't no time fer the writin' down of earmarks, though most like I could point him out in a crowd, an' say, 'That's the rooster.' But s'posin' a judge stood up another man that looked pretty much like him, an' asked me to swear one of the guys into ten years in Sing Sing, p'r'aps I'd weaken. Mistaken identity is like grabbin' up two kings an' a jack, an' playin' 'em fer threes."

"Which means, if I understand it, that you're guessing at the man—that I've given you all this trouble for nothing."

Crane wished that Farrell had kept his doubts to himself; the case had been made strong by his first

decision, and now the devil of uncertainty would destroy the value of identification.

"Not by a jugful!" ejaculated Farrell. "I'm just tellin' you this to show you that we've got to make it complete—we've got to get collateral to back up my pickin'."

"You mean some one else to identify him also?"

"No, not just that; but that's not a bad thought. My clerk, Ned Hagen, must have noticed him too. I mean that the bettor's badge number will be in line with that bet, an' you can probably find out the number of the badge this rooster wore."

An inspiration came with Farrell's words—came to Crane. Why had he not thought of that before? Still it didn't matter. The badge number, Mortimer's number, would be in Faust's book where had been entered the hundred dollars Mortimer put on Lauzanne. He could compare this with the number in Farrell's book; no doubt they would agree; then, indeed, the chain would be completed to the last link. No man on earth could question that evidence.

"It's a good idea, Farrell," he said.

"Bet yer life, it's clear Pinkerton. You'd better come round to my place to-morrow about ten, an' we'll look it up."

"I will," Crane answered.

XLIII

THE old bay horse that crawled back to Ringwood with Allis Porter after her interview with Crane must have thought that the millennium for driving horses had surely come. Even the ambition to urge the patriarch beyond his complacent, irritating dog trot was crushed out of her by the terrible new evidence the banker had brought in testimony against her lover.

"I didn't need this," the girl moaned to herself. In her intensity of grief her thoughts became audible in expressed words. "Oh, God!" she pleaded to the fields that lay in the silent rapture of summer content, "strengthen me against all this falseness. You didn't do it, George—you couldn't—you couldn't! And Alan! my poor, weak brother; why can't you have courage and clear your friend?"

Her heart rose in angry rebellion against her brother, against Crane, against Providence, even against the man she loved. Why should he sacrifice both their lives, become an outcast himself to shield a boy, who in a moment of weakness had committed an act which might surely be forgiven if he would but admit his mistake?—yes, it might even be called a mistake. The punishment accepted in heroic silence by Mortimer was out of all proportion to the wrong-doing. It meant the utter ruin of two lives. Firmly as she believed in his innocence, a conviction was forced upon her that unless Alan stood forth and boldly proclaimed the truth the

accumulated guilt-proof would cloud Mortimer's name, perhaps until his death. Even after that his memory might linger as that of a thief.

The evening before Alan had been at Ringwood and Allis had made a final endeavor to get him to clear the other's name by confessing the truth to Crane. On her knees she had pleaded with her brother. The boy had fiercely disclaimed all complicity, protested his own innocence with vehemence, and denounced Mortimer as worse than a thief in having poisoned her mind against him.

In anger Alan had disclosed Mortimer's treachery—as he called it—and crime to their mother. Small wonder that Allis's hour of trial was a dark one. The courage that had enabled her to carry Lauzanne to victory was now tried a thousandfold more severely. It seemed all that was left her, just her courage and faith; they had stood out successfully against all denunciation of Lauzanne, and, with God's help, they would hold her true to the man she loved.

Even the pace of a snail lands him somewhere finally, and the unassailed Bay, with a premonition of supper hovering obscurely in his lazy mind, at last consented to arrive at Ringwood.

Allis crept to her father like a fearsome child avoiding goblins. Providentially he had not been initiated into the moral crusade against the iniquitous Mortimer, so the girl clung to him as a drowning person might to a plank of salvation. She longed to tell him everything—of her love for Mortimer, perhaps he had guessed it, for he spoke brave words often of the sturdy young man who had saved her from Diablo. Perhaps she would tell him if she felt her spirit giving way—it

was cruel to stand quite alone—and beseech him, as he had faith in her, to believe in her lover.

Allis went to the tea table by her father's side, fearing to get beyond his hearing; she dreaded her mother's questioning eyes. What could be said in the accused man's defense, or in her own? Nothing; she could only wait.

A square old-fashioned wooden clock on the mantelpiece of the sitting room had just droned off seven mellow hours, when the faint echo of its music was drowned by the crunch of gravel; there was the quick step of somebody coming up the drive; then the wooden steps gave hollow notice. The visitor's advent was announced again by the brass knocker on the front door.

"I'll go," said Allis, as her mother rose. The girl knew who it was that knocked, not because of any sane reason; she simply knew it was Mortimer.

When she opened the door he stepped back hesitatingly. Was he not a criminal—was he not about to leave his position because of theft?

"Come in," she said, quietly; "I am glad you have come."

"Shall I? I just want to speak to you for a minute. I said I would come. But I can't see anybody—just you, alone."

"I understand," she answered. "Come inside."

"I am going away," he began; "I can't stand it here."

"You have done nothing—nothing to clear yourself?"

"Nothing."

"And you won't?"

"No."

"Is this wise?"

"It is the inevitable."

They were silent for a little; they were both standing. The girl broke the stillness.

"I am glad you have come, because I can tell you again that I know you are innocent. I know it, because my heart repeats it a thousand times a day. I listen to the small voice and I hear nothing else."

"You never waver—you never doubt?"

"Never."

"You never will?"

"Never."

"Then I care not. Other men have had misfortune thrust upon them and have borne it without complaint, have had less to solace them than you have given me now, and I should be a coward if I faltered. Some day perhaps, you will know that I am worthy of your faith. God grant that the knowledge brings you no fresh misery—there, forgive me, I have said too much; I am even now a coward. If you will say good-bye I'll go."

"Good-bye, my hero." She raised her eyes, blurred with tears, and held out her hand gropingly, as one searches in the dark, for the room whirled like a storm cloud, and just faintly she could see the man's strong face coming to her out of the gloom like the face of a god. He took her hand. "Good-bye," his voice vibrated brokenly; "if—if Justice wills that my innocence be known some day, may I come back? Will you wait, believing in me for a little?"

"Forever."

He drew her to him by the hand he still clasped, and put his strong arms about her. What mattered it now that he had been falsely accused—what mattered it to

either of them that he must accept the grim penalty of his endeavor? With them in the soft gloom was nothing but love, and faith, and innocence; and within the strong arms a sense of absolute security, as though the false accusing world had been baffled, beaten down, and the victory theirs—*love*.

He raised the girl's face and kissed her. "Let God witness that I press your brave lips in innocence," he said; "and in this pledge I love you forever and ever."

"Amen," came from Allis involuntarily; it sounded to them both like the benediction of a high priest.

"Amen," he responded. To speak again would have been sacrilege.

He put her from him gently, turned away and walked quickly from the house.

The girl sat for a long time a gray shadow in the gathering darkness. He was gone from her. It seemed as though she had scarce spoken the encouragement she wished to give him. It had been a meeting almost without words; but she felt strangely satisfied. The accusing revelation that had come from Crane in the afternoon had been a crushing blow. It was a mistake, of course; it wasn't true—somehow it wasn't true, but still it had stunned. Now in the gloaming she sat with an angel of peace; big, steadfast, honest eyes, full of thankfulness, looked lovingly at her from where he had stood. If she could sit there forever, with the echo of his deep "Amen" to their love lingering in her ears, she would ask no further gift of the gods.

Mortimer, as with swinging stride he hurried toward the village, let his mind flit back to the room of gray shadows. How little he had said! Had there been aught spoken at all? The strong arms still tingled

with tender warmth where the impress of an angel had set them thrilling ecstatically. Yes, what mattered their speech? There had been little of the future—no promise to send word of his well-being—but let the future look to itself. In the present he was king of a love realm that was greater than all the world.

Field after field flitted by, studded here and there by square, gray specters of ghost-like houses that blinked at him with red dragon eyes. Sub-consciously he knew the eyes were searching out the secret that made him in all his misery of misfortune so happy. And he would answer to the eyes, dragon or human, without fear and without shame—because he was innocent—that it was love, the greatest thing in all the world, the love and faith sublime of a good, true woman. Woman had he said?—an angel!

XLIV

As Farrell had suggested, Crane sought him at the office the next day at ten o'clock.

Farrell and his clerk were busy planning an enterprising campaign against men who had faith in fast horses for the coming week at Sheepshead Bay.

"Ah!" the Bookmaker exclaimed when Crane entered, "you want that badge number. Hagen, get the betting sheet for the second last day at Gravesend, and look up a bet of one thousand dollars we roped in over Mr. Crane's horse. I want the number to locate the man that parted—I wish there'd been more like him."

"Do you mean Billy Cass?" queried the clerk.

"Who the devil's Billy Cass?"

"Why the stiff that played The Dutchman for a thou'."

"You know him?" This query from Farrell.

"I should say! He's a reg'lar. Used to bet in Mullen's book last year when I penciled for him."

The clerk brought the betting sheet and ran his finger down a long row of figures.

"That's the bet. A thousand calls three on The Dutchman. His badge number was 11,785. Yes, that's the bet; I remember Billy Cass takin' it. You see," he continued, explanatory of his vivid memory, "he's gen'rally a piker—plays a long shot—an' his limit's twenty dollars; so, when he comes next a favorite that day with a cool thou', it give me stoppage of the heart.

Damn'd if I didn't get cold feet. Bet yer life it wasn't Billy's money—not a plunk of it; he had worked an angel, an' was playin' the farmer's stuff for him."

"Are you sure, Mr. Hagen—did you know the man?" Crane asked.

"Know him? All the way—tall, slim, blue eyes, light mustache, hand like a woman."

"That's the man," affirmed Farrell; "that's the man—I saw him yesterday in your place."

Crane stared. For once in his life the confusion of an unexpected event momentarily unsettled him.

"I thought you identified—which man in the bank did you mean?"

"I saw three: a short, dark, hairless kid"—Alan Porter, mentally ticked off Crane; "a tall, dark, heavy-shouldered chap, that, judged by his mug, would have made a fair record with the gloves—"

"Was not that the man you identified as having made the bet?" interrupted Crane, taking a step forward in his intense eagerness.

"Not on your life; it was the slippery-looking cove with fishy eyes."

"Cass," muttered Crane to himself; "but that's impossible—he never left the bank that day; there's some devilish queer mistake here." Farrell had identified *David Cass* in the bank as the man who had bet with him, while the clerk asserted that one *"Billy"* Cass had made the same wager. Hagen's description of "Billy" Cass fitted David Cass in a general way. Again the badge number—11,785—was not Mortimer's, as registered in Faust's book.

Crane stood pondering over the complication. He saw that until further investigation disproved it there

could be but one solution of this intricate riddle. Billy Cass, the maker of the bet, was a race track frequenter; David Cass was not. They must be separate personalities; but they resembled each other; they were of the same name—they might be brothers. Billy Cass had been in possession of the stolen note; he must have got it from some one having access to it in the bank—Mortimer, Alan Porter, or Cass—the cashier was quite out of the question.

The next move was to trace back through Billy Cass the man who had delivered to him the stolen money. There was still a chance that Mortimer, unfamiliar with betting and possibly knowing of Billy Cass through his brother in the bank—if they *were* brothers—had used this practical racing man as a commission agent. This seemed a plausible deduction. It was practically impossible that David Cass could have got possession of the bill, for it was locked in a compartment of which Mortimer had the key; the latter had admitted that the keys were not out of his possession.

This far in his hurried mental retrospect Crane spoke to Farrell: "I think this is all we can do at present. I may find it necessary to ask you to identify this Cass, but I hope not to trouble you any further in the matter."

"Hang the trouble!" energetically responded Farrell, with huge disclaiming of obligation; "I'll spend time and money to down a crook any day; I've no use for 'em; a few of that kidney gives the racin' game a black eye. If you need me or Hagen, just squeak, an' we'll hop onto the chap if he's a wrong one with both feet."

Crane said nothing about the other number he had

culled from Faust's book; he said nothing about his suspicions of a brotherhood; he wanted to go back to his quarters and think this new problem out.

What if in seeking for conclusive evidence against Mortimer he should prove him innocent? He was treading upon dangerous ground, pushing out of his path with a firebrand a fuse closely attached to a mine that might explode and shatter the carefully constructed fabric.

Sitting in his own chamber he once more went over the whole extraordinary entanglement. Mistaken as it was, Farrell's identification at Brookfield must have strongly affected the mind of Allis Porter. At the time Crane had played an honest part in recounting it to the girl. He had firmly believed that Farrell, owing to his ambiguous report, had meant Mortimer; in fact, Cass had not entered his mind at all. Even yet Mortimer might be the guilty man—probably was. Why should he, Crane, pursue this investigation that might turn, boomerang-like, and act disastrously. Mortimer was either a thief or a hero; there could be no question about that. As a hero, in this case, he was pretty much of a fool in Crane's eyes; but Allis Porter would not look upon it in that light—she would deify him. Crane would commit diplomatic suicide in developing Mortimer's innocence.

Again he asked himself why he should proceed. Mortimer was guilty in the strong, convicting light of the apparent evidence; better let it rest that happy way—happy for Crane. But still would he rest satisfied himself? He was not accustomed to doing things by halves. If Cass had stolen the money it would never do to retain him in a position of trust. Then the devil of

subtle diplomacy, familiar at all times to Crane, whispered in his ear that he need not blazen to the world the result of his further investigation; he might satisfy himself, and then if Mortimer were found still deeper in the toils it might be spoken of; but if he were found innocent—well, was Crane his brother's keeper?

He could adopt one of two plans to get at the truth; he could trace out Billy Cass and extort from him the name of his principal; but if startled, the latter might refuse to divulge anything. Police pressure meant publicity. There was a better plan—Crane always found a better plan in everything. If David Cass had stolen the money he must have sent it to his brother; if that fact were established it would show a connection between the two.

That afternoon Crane took a train to Brookfield. A visit to the village post office disclosed a hidden jewel. As far as Crane was concerned the fate of the two men was held in the hollow of the postmaster's hand. The latter, with little hesitation, allowed him to delve into official secrets.

He learned that David Cass had sent a letter, with a quick-delivery stamp on it, to William Cass, at A B C, East Fourteenth Street, New York, at 3:30 p. m., on June 12. So far as guilt or innocence was concerned there was nothing left to discover; the connection between these two men was demonstrated. Farrell's misidentification established another truth—they were brothers. The letter, hastening to its destination, had contained the stolen money. Mortimer would not give it to Cass to send away; even if he had done so he would not then have gone to Gravesend. Alan Porter

had also gone to Gravesend; if he had stolen the money he would have taken it with him.

David Cass, the unsuspected, was the thief. Mortimer, condemned, having restored the money—having taken upon himself with almost silent resignation the disgrace—was innocent. And all this knowledge was in Crane's possession alone, to use as he wished. The fate of his rival was given into his hands; and if he turned down his thumb, so, better for Mortimer that he had been torn of wild beasts in a Roman arena than to be cast, good name and all, to the wolves of righteous humanity.

As a dog carries home a bone too large for immediate consumption, Crane took back this new finding to his den of solitude in New York. At eight o'clock he turned the key in his door, and arm in arm with his now constant companion walked fitfully up and down, up and down, the floor. Sometimes he sat in a big chair that beckoned to him to rest; sometimes he raced with swift speed; once he threw himself upon his bed, and lay staring wide-eyed at the ceiling for hours. What mockery—hours! on the mantelpiece the clock told him that he had ceased his strides for a bare five minutes.

Then he thrust himself back into a chair, and across the table opposite sat Wrong, huge—grinning with a devilish temptation; not gold, but a perfume of lilacs, and the music of soft laughter like the tinkle of silver bells, the bejeweled light of sweet eyes that were gray, and all the temptation that Wrong held in itself was the possession of Allis Porter.

And Crane need commit no crime, unless inaction were a crime—just leave things as they were. In the

eyes of the world Mortimer was a thief; he would never claim Allis so branded.

Crane with a word could clear the accused man; he could go to David Cass and force him to confess. But why should he do it—sacrifice all he held dear in life? Everything that he had valued before became obliterated by the blindness of his love for the girl. Yet still the love seemed to soften him. Into his life had come new, strange emotions. The sensuous odor of stephanotis, that had not repelled in the old life, had come to suggest a pestilence in his nostrils, made clean by the purity of lilac. As he swayed in contention, the face of Wrong fronting him became the face of Sin—repellent, abhorrent; how could he ruin her life, and by a criminal act?

Hour by hour the struggle went on, until, exhausted, Crane flung himself upon his bed to rest a few minutes, and sleep, unsought, came and hushed the turmoil of his heart.

Without decision he had cast himself down; his mind, tortured in its perplexity, was unequal to the task of guiding him. So wearied he should have slept for hours, but, as the first glint of sunlight came through the uncurtained window, he sprang from his couch with the call of an uncompleted something in his ears.

But calm had come to him in his sleep; the question of right or wrong had been settled. He tried to remember how he had come to the conclusion that was alone in his rested mind. It must have been before he slept, though his memory failed him, for as he slumbered Allis Porter had come with the big gray eyes full of tears and asked him once again to spare Mortimer

humiliation for her sake. And he had answered, "He is innocent." God! he remembered it, even now it thrilled through his frame—she had bent over and kissed him on the forehead. Yes, that was what had wakened him. What foolish things dreams were. He had won just a kiss and had paid the price of his love; and now waking, and in the calm of a conflict passed, he had won over the demon that had tempted him with the perfume of lilacs. He had striven to the point when further strife became a crime. He had lost; but he would prove himself a good loser.

XLV

THAT day Crane went to Brookfield.

In spirit he was like a man that had been cast into an angry sea, and had battled his way through hungry waves to shore. Saved, the utter weariness of fierce strife hung heavy over his soul, and exhaustion deadened his joy of escape. Just saved, bereft of everything, he looked back over the dark waters and shuddered. And before him a dreary waste of desert shore-land stretched out interminably, and he must wander alone over its vast expanse forever.

Crane in all things was strong. It was strength drawn to right by the influence of the woman he loved that had saved him from the waters that were worse than the broad sands of a desolate life. But he still had something to do, the final act made possible by his redemption.

At Brookfield he went to the hotel, secured an isolated sitting room upstairs, and with this as a hall of justice, followed out with his usual carefulness a plan he had conceived. First he wrote a brief note to Allis Porter asking her to come and see him at once. One line he wrote made certain the girl's coming, "I have important news to communicate concerning Mr. Mortimer." Then he sent the note off with a man. Next he despatched a messenger for David Cass. He pulled out his watch and looked at it. It was three o'clock. "I think five will do," he muttered; "it should be all over by that

time." Another note addressed to Mortimer, asking him to call at the hotel at five o'clock, went forth.

The village hotel throbbed with the pressure of unwonted business. The proprietor surmised that a financial matter of huge magnitude was afloat—another farm was being mortgaged, most like; more money for Ringwood probably, for had not a buggy gone out there to bring some one in to the great financier. Those race horses were the devil to put a man in a hole.

David Cass came, treading on the heels of a much-whiskied hostler who had summoned him.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked of Crane. It may have been the stairs—for he had come up hurriedly—that put a waver in his voice; or it may have been a premonition of trouble.

"Take a seat, Mr. Cass," Crane answered, arranging a chair so that a strong light from the one window fell across the visitor's face.

The hostler who had shown Cass to where the big man awaited him lingered, a jagged wobble of humanity, leaning against the door jamb. He expected an order for "Red Eye," as he had baptized strong drink since it had grown familiarly into his being.

"Oh!" exclaimed Crane, "I'd forgotten; here's a quarter; much obliged. That's all."

The hostler's unjointed legs, unstable because of recurrent debauchery, carried him disconsolately to lower levels. The Banker must be sure of his business, must have it well in hand, when he ignored the usual diplomatic mollifying preparation of a drink.

The hostler had left the sitting-room door open; Crane closed it carefully, and, sitting with his back to the window, said to the bank clerk: "Mr. Cass, I am

going to be very candid with you; I am going to tell you that I have discovered *you stole the thousand dollars Mortimer has been accused of taking.*"

Cass's face blanched a bluish white; his jaw dropped loosely like the jaw of a man who had been suddenly struck a savage blow. His weak, watery, blue eyes opened wide in terror; he gasped for breath; he essayed to speak—to give even a cry of pain, but the muscles of his tongue were paralyzed. His right hand resting on the arm of his chair, as Crane ceased speaking, fell hopelessly by his side, where it dangled like the cloth limb of a dummy.

Crane saw all this with fierce satisfaction. He had planned this sudden accusation with subtle forethought. It even gave him relief to feel his suffering shifted to another; he was no longer the assailed by evil fortune, he was the assailant. Already the sustaining force of right was on his side; what a dreadful thing it was to squirm and shrink in the toils of crime. A thought that he might have been like this had he allowed Mortimer to stand accused flashed through his mind. He waited for his victim to speak.

At last Cass found strength to say: "Mr. Crane, this is a terrible accusation; there is some dreadful mistake—I did not—"

The other interrupted him. The man's defense must be so abjectly hopeless, such a cowardly weak string of lies, that out of pity, as he might have ceased to beat a hound, Crane continued, speaking rapidly, holding the guilty man tight in the grasp of his fierce denunciation.

"You stole that note. You sent it, with a quick-delivery stamp to your brother, Billy Cass, in New York, and he bet it for you on my horse, The Dutchman, on

the 13th, and lost it. Mortimer, thinking that Alan Porter had taken the money, replaced it, and you nearly committed a greater crime than stealing when you allowed him to be dishonored, allowed him to be accused and all but convicted of your foolish sin. It is useless to deny it, all this can be proved in court. I have weighed the matter carefully, and if you confess you will not be prosecuted; if you do not, you will be sent to the penitentiary."

Cass, stricken beyond the hope of defense, rose from his chair, steadying himself with his hands on the table, leaned far over it, as though he were drawn physically by the fierce magnetism of his accuser, and spoke in a voice scarce stronger than the treble of a child's: "My God! Mr. Crane! Do you mean it, that you won't prosecute me? Did you say that?"

"Not if you confess."

"Thank God—thank you, sir. I'm glad, I'm glad; I've been in hell for days. I haven't slept. Mortimer's eyes have stared at me all through the night, for I liked him—everybody liked him—he was good to me. Oh, God! I should have gone out of my mind with more of it. I didn't steal the money—no, no! I didn't mean to steal it; the Devil put it into my hands. Before God, I never stole a dollar in my life. But it wasn't that—it wasn't the money—it was to think that an innocent man was to suffer—to have his life wrecked because of my folly."

How it was coming home to Crane. Had he not dabbled his hands in the same sin, almost committed it?

"You have never known what it is to suffer in that way. But let me tell you all. I must. Then perhaps you will understand how I was tempted. For years I

have been ground in poverty. My mother and my sister, even my brother have all looked to me. My brother should have supported them, but all his money went on the race course, gambling. When I heard Alan Porter tell Mortimer that your horse was sure to win, for the first time in my life I felt a desire to get money that way. But I had no money to bet. That day as I went into the vault I saw under a lower shelf—the Devil drew my eyes that way—a bank note. I hardly knew it was a bank note, for I saw but a piece of paper indistinctly in the dim light. I picked it up. Oh, God! if I hadn't touched it! I looked at it. My heart jumped in my throat and choked me; my head swam. In my ears were strange voices, saying: 'Take it! Put it in your pocket!' Perhaps it was because it was so large—a thousand dollars—perhaps it was because it seemed lost, out of place, I don't know. I had handled thousands and thousands before, and never felt that way.

"The devil voices that were in my ears said: 'This is your chance. Take it, borrow it, no one will know. Bet it on the horse that will surely win, and you will get many thousands; then you can replace it, and for once in your life you will know what it is to have something of your own.'

"I tried to put it back. I couldn't. The voices called me a fool, a coward. I thought of my mother, my sister, what I could do if I had the courage. I tried to take it in to Mr. Lane and say that I had found it. I couldn't. Oh, my God! you don't know what it is to be tempted! You have been successful, and don't know how miserably weak ill-fortune makes a man. I yielded—I took it; then when its loss was discovered, and Mortimer was accused, I tried to confess—I

couldn't; I was a coward, a traitor, a Judas. Oh, God!"

The overwrought man threw himself face down on the table in front of his grim accuser, like a child's broken doll, and wept with great sobs that shook his frame as the wind lashes the waters into turmoil.

An exultation of righteous victory swept through Crane's soul. He might have been like that; he had been saved from it by his love for a good woman. He could not despise the poor broken creature who confessed so abjectly, because all but in deed he also had sinned. The deepest cry of despair from Cass was because of the sin he had committed against his friend—against Mortimer.

Crane waited until Cass's misery had exhausted itself a little, and when he spoke his voice was soft in pity.

"I understand. Sit in your chair there and be a man. Half an hour ago I thought you a thief—I don't now. You had your time of weakness, perhaps all men have that; you fell by the wayside. I don't think you'll do it again."

"No, no, no! I wouldn't go through the hell I've lived in again for all the money in the world. And I'm *so* glad that it is known; I feel relief."

"Well, it is better that the truth has come out, because everything can be put right. I was going to make you pay back the thousand dollars to Mortimer—I was going to drive you from the bank—I was going to let it be known that you had stolen the money, but now, I must think. You must have another chance. It's a dangerous thing to wreck lives—"

"My God! it is; that's what haunted me night and day. I felt as though I had murdered a man who had

been my friend. I knew he thought young Porter had taken it and was shielding him. The memory of the misery in Mortimer's face at being counted a thief would have stuck to me if I had lived a hundred years."

Cass had interrupted Crane. When he ceased again out of exhaustion, Crane proceeded, "Mortimer must be paid back the money."

"I'll save and work my fingers off till I do it."

"You can't. Those dependent upon you would starve. I'll attend to that myself."

"And you will let me go without—"

"No, you can't go."

"My God! I'm to be prosecuted?"

"No, you can stay in the bank. I don't think you'll ever listen to the voices again; it's bad business."

Cass sat and stared at the strange man who said these things out of silly expressionless eyes that were blurred full of tears.

"Yes, you can go right on as you have been. It will be understood that the money was found, had been mislaid; I'll think that out. It's nobody's business just now; I run the bank and you take orders from me. Go back to your desk and stay there. I've got to tell Mortimer and Miss Porter that you made this mistake, and Lane, too, I suppose, but nobody else will ever know of it. I was going to make you sign a confession, but it's not needed. You may go now."

Cass rose, his thin legs seeming hopelessly inadequate to the task of carrying his body, and said, "Will you take my hand, sir?"

"Of course I will. Just do right from this on, and forget—no, better not forget; *remember* that there is no crime like weakness; all crime comes from weakness.

Be strong, and listen to no more voices. But I needn't tell you. I know from this out I can trust you further than a man who has never been tried."

At the door Cass turned and looked back at the man who had reached down into the abyss, pulled him up, and stood him on his feet. The man was sitting quite still, his back to the light, his head drooped, and Cass could not see his face. He strove futilely for some adequate expression of gratitude, but his senses were numb from the shock of what he had escaped; he simply nodded twice toward the sitting figure, turned, and passed out into the street, where the sunlight baptized him with warmth as though he had been born again.

"Poor, weak devil!" muttered Crane; then he shivered. Had the imbecile's talk of voices got on to his nerves? Surely a voice had whispered derisively in his ear, "Which one is the poor, weak devil?" And in answer within his soul Crane knew that the margin was indeed of infinitesimal narrowness. Cass, hastened in his temptation, yielding to the first insane impulse, not knowing that the damnation of a friend hung on his act, had fallen. He, Crane, in full knowledge that two innocent lives might be wrecked by his doing, had been kept to the right only after hours of struggle, and by the supporting influence of a supreme love. To have gained Allis Porter by the strategy of a villain could not be the method of holy passion. To sacrifice his desire and give her back her lover *was* love, love worthy of the girl.

For an hour he waited; then there was turmoil on the stairway; horses were surely coming up. At the door a thick voice explained the diversion. The hostler

had again arrived, with an hour of increased drunkenness pulling mercilessly at his erratic legs.

"John Porter's gal 'sh here, an'—an'—" the hostler wrestled with the mental exercise that had been entrusted to his muddled brain. He'd swear that she was there, for his eyes had seen her, two of her; and also he had a hazy idea that when he essayed the stairs she had entrusted to him some message. He groped fitfully among the wheels that buzzed in his skull for the elusive something connected with her advent. The heredity of habit came to his assistance.

"D'ye want a drink?" he asked, with a sudden brightening.

"Drink!" a voice cried. "I don't want any drink." A strong hand had him by the collar, and the house was rocking violently to and fro; he could scarcely keep his feet.

"Wake up, you're drunk. Is Miss Porter down stairs?"

"Porter, Porter, yesh, Portersh gal; thatsh what I said. Whatsh matter with you?—leg—go. Keep cool, don't get excited."

"Here, get out—go down stairs!" And he did, hurriedly.

Crane had followed him down. Allis was standing just within the hall door.

"Good afternoon, Miss Porter," he said. "It was good of you to come. I've got something very important to tell you, and it's better that we have quiet—it doesn't seem quite the usual order of things here. Should you mind coming upstairs to the sitting room, where we shall be undisturbed?"

"I don't mind," answered the girl, simply.

"Have a chair," he said, motioning to the one Cass had lately sat in.

Crane did not take the other seat, but paced restlessly up and down the room; it cooled the fever of his mind.

"I hope it isn't more bad news, Mr. Crane," Allis said; for her companion seemed indisposed to break the silence.

"It is—" the girl started—"for me," Crane added, after a little pause; "and yet I am glad."

"That sounds strange," Allis commented, wonderingly.

"What I am going to say to you means the destruction of the dearest hope I have in life, but it can't be helped. Now I wouldn't have it any other way."

Suddenly he stopped in his swift pace, faced the girl, and asked, "You are quite sure you can't love me?" He was waiting for an answer.

"No, I can't—I hate to cause you misery, but I must speak the truth; you have asked for it."

"And you've answered honestly. I know it was foolish in me to ask the impossible. Just one more question and then I will tell you why I brought you here. Do you still believe in Mortimer's innocence—do you love Mortimer?"

"Yes."

"If I were to tell you that he is innocent, that I have discovered the guilty one."

"Oh, my God!" It was a cry of sudden joy, incapable of exact expression, irrelevant in its naming of the Deity, but full in its exultation of soul. Then, in quick transformation, the girl collapsed, as Cass had done, and huddled in her chair, stricken by the sudden conviction that the crime had been brought home to

her brother. Her lover was guiltless; but to joy over it was a sin, inhuman, for was not Alan the thief, if Mortimer were innocent?

Crane understood. He had forgotten. He stepped quickly to the girl's side, put his hand tenderly on her head; her big gray eyes stared up at him full of a shrinking horror.

"Poor little woman!" he said, "your big, tender heart will be the death of you yet. But I've got only good news for you this time. Neither Mortimer nor Alan took the money—it was Cass.

"They are both innocent?"

"Yes, both."

"Oh, my God, I thank Thee." She pulled herself up from the chair, holding to Crane's arm, and looking in his face, said, "You did this; you found the guilty man for me?"

Crane nodded his head; and it came to the girl as she looked, that the eyes she had thought narrow in evil grew big and round and full of honesty, and soft with gentleness for her.

"How can I thank you—what can I do or say to repay you?" She knew what it must have cost the man to clear his rival's name.

"It was your doing, Miss Allis; it is I who must thank you. You made a man of me, brought more good into my life than had been there for forty years. I will be honest. I did not do this of myself, my own free will. In my love for you, and desire to have you with me always, I almost committed a crime. I was tempted to conceal the discovery I had made; I knew that if I cleared Mortimer you were lost to me. I struggled with temptation and fell asleep still not conquering it. In

my sleep I dreamed—I don't think it was a dream—it was like a vision—you came to me, and when I said that Mortimer was innocent, you kissed me on the forehead. I woke then, and the struggle had ceased—the temptation had passed. I came down here, and Cass has confessed that he took the money."

"Would you like it—would you think it wrong—it seems so little for me to do—may I kiss you now, as I did in your dream, and thank you from the bottom of my heart for making me so happy? It all seems like a dream to me now."

For answer Crane inclined his head, and Allis, putting her hand upon his shoulder, kissed him on the forehead, and through him went a thrill of great thankfulness, of joy such as he knew would never have come to him had he gained through treachery even this small token of conquest.

"There," he said, taking Allis by the arm, and gently drawing her back to the chair; "now I am repaid a thousandfold for not doing a great wrong. You have beaten me twice within a few days. I fancy I should almost be afraid to be your husband, you master me so easily."

"That's Mortimer coming," Crane said, suddenly, as a step with more consistency in its endeavor than pertained to the hostler's, sounded, coming up the stairs. "I sent for him," he added, seeing the look of happy confusion in Allis's face.

"Come in," he called cheerily, in answer to a knock on the door.

"You sent for me—" Then Mortimer stopped suddenly, and stood staring first at Allis, then at Crane, alternately, back and forth from one to the other.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Crane turned his back upon the younger man and busied himself wondrously over the manipulation of a chair. A strange dread crept into Mortimer's heart; it smothered him; he felt dizzy. Why did Allis look so happy—why were there smiles on her lips when she must know there were ashes of gloom in his soul? Why was she alone there with Crane? Was it but another devilish trick of the misfortune that pursued him?

"Good afternoon, Miss—" the words stuck in Mortimer's throat, and he completed his greeting with a most dreadfully formal bow.

The girl laughed outright; how droll it was to see a man trying to make himself unhappy when there was nothing but happiness in the world. Through the open window she could hear the birds singing, and through it came the perfume of clover-buried fields; across the floor streamed warm, bright sunlight from a blue sky in which was no cloud. And from their lives, Mortimer's and her own, had been swept the dark cloud—and here, in the midst of all this joy was her lover with a long, sad face, trying to reproach her with a stiff, awkward bow.

Her laugh twirled Crane about like a top. He saw the odd situation; there was something incongruous in Mortimer's stiff attitude. Crane had a big cloud of his own not quite driven from his sky, but a smile hovered on his thin lips. This happiness was worth catching.

Mortimer noticed the distasteful mirth reflected in the other man's face, and he repeated with asperity, "You sent for me, sir—may I ask—"

"Will you take a chair," said Crane, and he pushed the one he had been toying with toward Mortimer. The latter remained standing.

Allis sprang forward and caught him by the arm—Crane turned away, suddenly discovering that from the window the main street of Brookfield was a most absorbing study.

"I'm so happy," began Allis. Mortimer shivered in apprehension. Why had Crane turned his face away—what was coming? How could she be happy, how could anyone in the world be happy? But evidently she was. She stole a quick look at Crane—to be exact, Crane's back, for his head and shoulders were through the window.

Then the girl—she had to raise on her tiptoes—kissed the sad man on the cheek. I'm ashamed to say that he stared. Were they all mad—was he not standing with one foot in the penitentiary?

She drew him toward the chair, calling to Crane: "Will you please tell Mr. Mortimer the good news. I am too happy; I can't."

A fierce anger surged in Mortimer's heart; it was true, then—his disgrace had been too much for Allis. The other had won; but it was too cruel to kiss him.

Crane faced about, and coming forward, held out his hand to the man of distrust. I hope you'll forgive me."

Mortimer sprang to his feet, shoving back his chair violently, and stood erect, drawn to his full height, his right hand clenched fiercely at his side. "Shake hands? No, a thousand times no!" he muttered to himself.

Crane saw the action, and his own hand dropped. "Perhaps I ask too much," he said, quietly; "I wronged you—"

Mortimer set his teeth and waited. There were great beads of perspiration on his forehead, and his broad

chest set his breath whistling through contracted nostrils. A pretty misdirected passion was playing him. This was why they had sent for him—the girl he would have staked his life on had been brought to believe in his guilt, and had been won over to his rival. Ah—a new thought; his mind, almost diseased by unjust accusation, prompted it—perhaps it was to save him from punishment that Allis had consented to become Crane's wife.

"But I believed you guilty—" Mortimer started as Crane said this—"now I know that you are innocent, I ask—"

Mortimer staggered back a step and caught at the chair to steady himself. He repeated mechanically the other's words: "You know I'm innocent?"

"Yes, I've found the guilty man."

"Then Alan—oh, the poor lad! It's a mistake—you are wrong. The boy didn't take the money—I took it."

Crane looked at him in admiration, an indulgent smile on his lips.

"Nonsense, my dear sir!" he exclaimed, dryly; "Alan did not take the money—neither did you. Cass took it, and you wasted a day of the bank's time covering the crime for him."

"Cass took it?" asked Mortimer in a dazed way, looking from Crane to Allis.

"Yes; he has confessed, so you see he's ahead of you in that line." He went on, speaking hurriedly: "I ask you to forgive me now for my suspicions. Your innocence is completely established. You acted like a hero in trying to shield Alan Porter, and I like men of that stamp. The thousand dollars you paid in will be restored to you; it is yours. We will devise some scheme

for clearing up the matter as far as your good name is concerned that will shield poor Cass from people who have no business in this affair."

"But how did Cass manage to get the note?"

"Found it on the floor of the vault, he says."

"I don't see how it could have fallen out of the box, because the three bills were pinned to the note."

Crane drew forth a pocket book, and opening it took out the bill that had been stolen. He examined it closely, holding it up in front of the window.

"I think you are mistaken," he said, "there are no pin holes in this bill; I see," he continued, "the pin had not gone through this one; being detached, in handling the box, it has slipped out."

"It must have," concurred Mortimer. "I remember in putting the box in the compartment once I had to turn it on its edge; the bill being loose, as you say, has slipped to the floor, and as the vault was dark I did not notice it."

"It doesn't matter," added Crane. "I must go now. Good-bye, Miss Allis."

Turning to Mortimer he held out his hand.

"Good-bye, and long happiness to you both," he said; "I trust you will think kindly of me and poor Cass. I am sure we are sorry for what has been done."

As Crane went down the stairs he wondered why he had coupled himself with Cass. Was the difference so slight—had they been together in the same boat up to the point of that silly, fantastic dream. Perhaps they had.

XLVI

WITH the going of Crane an awkward restraint came over the two who were left; the man who had suffered so much for the woman's sake, and the girl who had endeavored so much.

He was like a man suddenly thrust into a new world of freedom; he indulged in a physical manifestation of its exhilaration, drinking in a long, deep draught of the clover-scented air, until his great lungs sighed with the plethora. It seemed a lifetime that he had lived in the noisome atmosphere of a felon's cell. But now the crime had dropped from him; a free man in every sense of the word, he could straighten himself up and drink of the air that was without taint.

Allis watched Mortimer curiously; she was too happy to speak—just to look upon him standing there, her undefiled god, her hero, with his heroism known and applauded, was a suffusing ecstasy. He was so great, so noble, that anything she might say would be inane, tawdry, inconsequent; so she waited, patiently happy, taking no count of time, nor the sunshine, nor the lilt of the birds, nor even the dissolution of conventionality in the unsupervised tete-a-tete.

The ecstatic magnetism of congenial silence has always a potency, and its spell crept into Mortimer's soul and laid embargo on his tongue. He crossed over to Allis, and taking her slender hand in his own, crouched down on the floor beside her chair, and looked

up into her face, just as a great St. Bernard might have done, incapable of articulating the wealth of love and gratitude and faithfulness that was in his heart.

Even then the girl did not speak. She drew the man's strong rugged head close up to her face, and nestled her cheek against his. Love without words; love greater than words. It was like a fairy dream; if either spoke the gentle gossamer web of it would float away like mist, and of needs they must talk of the misery that had passed.

In the end the girl spoke first, saying like a child having a range of but few words, "You are happy now, my hero?"

"Too happy—I almost fear to wake and find that I've been dreaming."

She kissed him.

"Yes, it's real," he answered; "in dreams happiness is not so positive as this. You did not doubt?" he queried.

"Never."

"You would have waited?"

"Forever."

"And now—and now, we must still wait—"

"Not forever."

They talked of the wonderful necromacy the gods had used to set their lives to the sweet music of happiness. How Lauzanne the Despised had saved Ringwood to her father; how he had won Alan's supposed price of redemption for Mortimer; how he had stood sturdy and true to the girl of much faith and all gentleness. And the room became a crypt of confessional when she, in penitence, told of her ride on the gallant Chestnut.

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CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

Just a span of Fate's hand from these two happy mortals, and twice the sand had sifted through the hour glass, sat a man all alone in his chamber. On his table was the dust of solitariness; and with his finger he wrote in it "Forever." But he looked fearlessly across the board, for there sat no grinning demon of temptation, nor remorse, nor fear. But a fragrance as of lilacs and of sweet clover coming through an open window was in his nostrils; and in his memory was the picture of a face he loved, made like unto an angel's with gratitude, and on his forehead still burned, like a purifying fire, a kiss that reached down into his soul and filled him with the joy of thankfulness.

THE END.

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